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THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN ANGEL

A Murder Mystery in a Newspaper Office

It was an incredible crime that sent a shudder through the *Courier* office. Picture the feverish activity, the swift action, the marvellous organisation; news being sought, selected, sub-edited. The mighty presses down below preparing for their million run . . . and the night editor is found murdered. *The Mystery of the Golden Angel*, a cleverly constructed drama with an interesting newspaper setting, is undoubtedly one of the most thrilling and baffling stories that Francis D. Grierson has written.



By the Same Author

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
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| THE LADY OF DESPAIR | THE MYSTERIOUS MADEMOISELLE |
| THE JACKDAW MYSTERY | MYSTERY IN RED |
| MURDER IN MORTIMER SQUARE | |

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN ANGEL

FRANCIS D. GRIERSON



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FOREWORD

THE author wishes to assure his many friends in Fleet Street that this attempt to sketch a drama in Newspaperland is not intended to describe the office of any particular journal, and that the characters do not refer to any living persons.

The scenes, events and persons are entirely fictitious.

CHAPTER I

SIR PETER THEALE put his note-case in his pocket, smiled at the other three men at the bridge table, and rose.

"Glad I lost," he said. "You can't say I rooked you and ran away. Got to go down to the office now."

"You newspaper magnates can't think of anything but your rags," his partner retorted. "I wonder you don't put a bed in the *Courier* office and sleep there."

"I've done that before now," Theale chuckled, and turned sharply as a page-boy presented a slip of paper on a salver.

"They're holding the line for you, sir," said the boy.

"All right."

Nodding to the others, Theale left the card room.

The Greville Club was comfortable, but old-fashioned. It did not run to portable telephones. In the corridor outside the card room there was a telephone cabinet. Sir Peter entered it, and was switched through by the club switchboard operator.

"Theale speaking," he said, in his brusque way. "What is it?"

The voice of the Night News Editor—strangely agitated for a man of his sophistication—came through from the office of the *Daily Courier*.

"It's Miller, Sir Peter," he said. "Can you come down at once, please?"

"What the devil's the matter?"

"It's Mr. Pettigrew. We've found him lying dead."

"Dead? Good God! But he was all right——"

The voice cut across his words:

"I'm afraid he's been murdered."

"Mur——? It can't be! I'll come at once. Have you sent for the police?"

"Yes, Sir Peter. I got on to the Yard myself. Dale, the Assistant Commissioner, happened to be there, and he's coming down."

"Good."

Sir Peter's newspaper training asserted itself.

"Tell Vincent to take charge," he directed, and replaced the receiver.

As he stepped out of the box he almost collided with one of the men with whom he had been playing bridge.

"Ah, Furlong," he said. "The very man. I wonder if you'd help me?"

"Of course, if I can. What's wrong?"

"You remember Pettigrew, my Night Editor on the *Courier*? You met him here at lunch with me one day."

"Of course. Nice fellow."

"Well, he's just been murdered in the office."

"What?"

"They've just telephoned me. I'd be grateful if you'd come along."

"Of course—but—the police?"

"They've been sent for. It's all right. You'll be acting for me in case of need, that's all."

"In that case——"

"Come on, then. My car's outside."

The hall porter fetched Sir Peter's car while they got their hats and coats, and in a few minutes they were driving down Pall Mall in the direction of Fleet Street.

Sir Peter had relapsed into the taciturnity from which it took a great deal to startle him.

Richard Furlong, whose capacity for silence at the right moment was not the least of his gifts, lit a cigarette.

"Damnable business!" said Theale suddenly. "Can't

understand why anybody should want to murder Pettigrew. Good fellow. Been with me for twenty years."

Richard shot a glance at his companion, and then looked out of the window. He had never seen Sir Peter so greatly moved before.

"I suppose there's no doubt he *was* murdered?" he hinted.

"I don't know. I only know what I've been told. Miller rang me up; he's the Night News Editor. He says Hubert Dale is coming from Scotland Yard."

"Good fellow, Dale; decent of him to come himself."

Sir Peter grunted assent.

"Pettigrew been in any trouble?" Richard asked.

"None that I know of. Should think he'd have told me if he had. Hope so, anyhow."

Richard smiled.

Sir Peter was rather a tearsome person to the world at large. His gruff manner was accentuated by the heavy mass of grey hair over the broad forehead; the shaggy eyebrows; and the strong jaw below the thick, square-trimmed, grey moustache. But those who knew him best realised that the keen blue eyes behind the tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles could twinkle with unexpected humour, and the firm mouth could soften into an oddly attractive smile. . . .

The car hummed down Fleet Street—almost free of traffic at that hour—turned off into Friary Square, and stopped outside the great building that housed the *Courier* and the machinery and staff needed to produce its two million copies a day.

The night commissioner on duty in the front hall signalled to a lift-boy.

"He—Mr. Pettigrew—he's in your room, Sir Peter," he murmured.

The lift stopped at the second floor and Sir Peter led the way along the corridor.

A constable stood outside a door.

"I am Sir Peter Theale," the owner explained, and the man saluted and stood aside.

Theale opened the door and entered, followed by Richard.

There were half a dozen men there, grouped about something that lay on the carpet.

They looked up at the interruption, and Hubert Dale, one of the Assistant Commissioners at Scotland Yard, came forward.

"Good-evening," he said.

"Evening," Theale responded, staring down at the inert body on the floor. "It's true, then?"

"Yes."

"Murder?"

"I'm afraid so."

"But who could have done it?"

"We must try to find out."

Furlong exchanged nods with Dale, and looked round the room with trained observation.

It was comfortably, but not extravagantly, furnished; the room of a man whose tastes were simple without being austere.

A large, flat-topped writing table stood near the window, with a telephone, an inkstand and a few other articles on it. Some chairs, a settee, a few bookcases and a cupboard comprised the other furniture. There was no coal in the grate; instead, a portable electric fire stood near the writing table, connected by a flex to a wall-plug.

On the thick carpet, near the door, lay the body of a middle-aged man.

The cause of death was apparent—a deep, jagged wound over the right temple. The weapon was not less obvious; a heavy silver-plated desk-lamp, its flex torn away, lay beside the body, with blood and hair adhering to one of the sharp corners of its square base.

Sir Peter's eyes blazed as he turned to the Assistant Commissioner.

"Pettigrew was my friend, as well as a member of my staff, Dale," he said slowly. "We've got to find the man who killed him."

"We'll do our best," Dale answered.

"I know you will, and the *Courier* is going to help you. But if you fail—and don't think I mean to suggest that you will—by God! we'll find him, if it costs me every penny I have to do it!"

CHAPTER II

SIR PETER's outburst was so unlike his usual reserve that for a moment a strained silence followed his words.

Dale bridged the gap by moving everybody out of the way so that the Yard photographer he had brought might get such pictures of the position of the body, and other details, as they deemed necessary. The flashlight powder made its miniature explosion several times before they were satisfied.

Then Dale sent the camera-man back to the Yard and resumed the examination he had been making, with Detective-sergeant Reed, when Sir Peter and Furlong arrived.

Richard raised his eyebrows as Dale casually moved the blood-crusted lamp with his bare hands, and the Assistant Commissioner replied to the unspoken criticism.

"Not a print," he said. "That was the first thing we looked for, naturally; but, whoever he was, the fellow knew his job: he wore gloves." He turned to Sir Peter. "Where does that lead to?" he asked, pointing to a door at one end of the room.

"Miss Farren's room; she's my secretary," Theale explained. "You'd better mind your hands," he added, as Dale approached the door. "The room is being done up, and I believe the paint is wet. Miss Farren is using another room for the present."

Dale opened the door; Furlong, looking over his shoulder, saw a small room, glistening with fresh paint and littered with the folding ladders, paint-pots and other odds and ends that decorators leave on the scene of their unfinished labours.

Dale stepped gingerly into the room, avoiding the new paint, and picked up a dust sheet that lay on the floor. He returned to the larger room, closing the door behind him, and spread the sheet over Pettigrew's body.

"I think we'll have Miss Farren in now," he said.

Sir Peter stared at him.

"Miss Farren?" he repeated; "what do you want her for?"

"It was she who found the body," Dale explained. "I just want to ask her a few questions."

"But she ought to have gone home long ago."

"I understand she was working late."

"Can't you see her in another room? It's not very pleasant for a girl——" He pointed to the body, veiled by its covering.

"Sorry. I must have her in here just for a moment. Then we can go somewhere else. Would you please send for her?"

Sir Peter shrugged his shoulders and turned to a man who had been standing quietly in a corner, unnoticed.

"Doyle," he said, "please ask Miss Farren to come here."

Hubert Dale looked inquiringly at the man.

"I didn't see you come in," he remarked.

"This is Mr. Martin Doyle, our chief crime re-

porter," Sir Peter put in. "He'd get in anywhere—it's his job," he added dryly.

"I know you by name, Mr. Doyle," said Dale, smiling, "though I don't think we've met before. You know Sergeant Reed, of course?"

"Oh, yes; we're old friends. I hope you don't mind my butting in?"

"That's all right. Now, if you'd be so kind as to ask Miss Farren to come——"

"I'll fetch her at once."

He left the room, and returned almost at once with a slim, pretty girl, who was evidently maintaining her composure with a great effort. She shot a quick glance at the shrouded body, and caught her breath.

"It's all right," said Sir Peter hurriedly. "Sorry to have to ask you to come . . . Mr. Dale just wants to ask you——"

"I can understand what a shock this must have been to you, Miss Farren," the Assistant Commissioner put in. "Would you just tell me what you know about the affair?"

"I was working late on some work I was behind with," the girl explained in a low voice. "I left my room to go to one of the other offices, and noticed a light in here. I thought Sir Peter must have come back earlier than he'd been expected, and I came in to ask him a question. Then I saw—Mr. Pettigrew—lying there."

"He was lying exactly where he is now?"

"Yes."

"And everything else in the room is just as it was then?"

She looked about her.

"I think so," she answered. "No—the lamp——"

"Ah, yes; I moved it. There was no one else in the room?"

"No one."

"What did you do then?"

"I—I was terrified. I ran out of the room and told Mr. Miller."

"I see. And that's really all you know about it?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. I needn't bother you any more just now, but perhaps you wouldn't mind staying in the building a little longer in case any other point crops up."

"Run along to your room," said Sir Peter; and when she had gone he added to Martin Doyle: "Tell someone to get her some brandy, or she'll be fainting, or something."

Dale turned to Sir Peter.

"You knew Pettigrew well?" he asked.

"Very well. He'd been with us more years than I care to remember."

"Can you suggest any reason——?"

"Why he should have been murdered? None at all."

"Did you keep any valuables in this room?"

"No; but you're not suggesting that Pettigrew would have taken them if there had been any?"

"No, but he might have been attacked by a thief."

"There was nothing here for a thief to take."

"No valuable papers, for instance?"

"Papers?" Sir Peter stared. "Don't know what you mean."

Sergeant Reed, at a glance from Dale, produced a little box, opened it and shook on to the writing table some tiny fragments of paper.

"We think Mr. Pettigrew may have been holding some paper which the murderer snatched from him," he explained. "These bits of paper had caught in the finger-nails of his right hand."

Sir Peter, who knew that many a man has been hanged by the clue of a morsel of cloth or other sub-

stance found beneath his victim's finger-nail, opened his pen-knife and took up the largest fragment of paper on the blade.

"Try this," said Dale, handing him a Coddington lens.

"Thickish paper, with a blue tinge," said Theale, peering.

"An envelope, possibly," Dale suggested, and Sir Peter started.

"An envelope!" he repeated. "I wonder——"

He stopped abruptly, and the others watched him curiously.

"Dale," he went on, "have you searched Pettigrew—taken the things out of his pockets, I mean?"

"Not yet."

"Well, could you get hold of his keys? They should be in one of his pockets. Somehow, I don't care to——"

Reed, less sensitive, uncovered the body and presently found a small steel ring with half a dozen keys on it.

"Let's go along to Pettigrew's room," said Sir Peter, and they trooped out in his wake.

The dead man's room was some distance away, near that of the Night News Editor. Theale led the way in. The electric light was already on. The furniture was much like that of his own room, but in one corner stood a massive safe.

"As Night Editor," Sir Peter explained, "Pettigrew had to keep a considerable sum of money handy. It might be necessary to pay promptly for special exclusive news when the cashiers' office was closed; or money might be needed for a reporter who was being sent off somewhere in a hurry. That is why he had a safe here. Will you give me those keys, Sergeant?"

Theale selected a key, tried it, and threw back the door of the safe. He went quickly through the con-

tents—some papers and memoranda, and packages of Treasury and Bank of England notes—and then turned to the others with a bewildered air.

"This is a queer business," he said slowly.

"Money missing, sir?" asked Reed, but Sir Peter shook his head impatiently.

"Damn the money!" he answered brusquely. "I haven't counted it. Anyhow, there's a good sum there, and a thief would have taken it all."

"Then what *is* missing?" Dale demanded.

Sir Peter looked from one to the other.

"You'd better sit down and listen," he said. Doyle, see that the door is shut."

He sat down at Pettigrew's desk, and the others grouped themselves near him, Dale and Furlong on a settee, Reed in an armchair and Doyle leaning against the mantelpiece.

"I need hardly tell you," Theale went on, "that all sorts of people come to newspaper offices with all sorts of tales. Some of the people are mad, some are crooks, some are genuine. Naturally, we don't swallow everything we're told; on the other hand, it doesn't pay to be too incredulous, or you may turn down a big story. You'll see in a minute why I mention this.

"Well, yesterday someone telephoned here and asked to speak to me."

"Man or woman?" Dale put in.

"A man, by the voice. He flatly refused to deal with anyone else; said that if he couldn't speak to me he would ring off. He also said we'd lose something pretty good if we didn't look sharp, or words to that effect.

"To come to the point: I had him switched through to me. He evidently knew my voice, for he was satisfied as soon as he heard me speak. He told me he hoped to be in a position to give me some very startling news, of great public importance, but it was most important that

no one should know where we obtained it. In fact, he did not care to be seen coming into the office.

"There was nothing unusual in that," Sir Peter broke off to explain. "People often tell us things on condition that we don't give them away.

"I offered," he went on, "to send a reporter to see him, but he refused, so I told him that I could not deal with a person I knew nothing about, or accept information without satisfying myself that it came from a reliable source. The man said he had expected that, and he made me this offer: he was prepared to send me a sealed envelope containing the information, if I would give him my word of honour not to open the envelope for three days unless I heard from him in the meantime. If I heard nothing, I was free to use the information when the three days had elapsed; but—and this was what he insisted on most strongly—if he rang me up during the three days, he was entitled to demand that I should burn the envelope, with its contents unread, or dispose of it in any other way he might require."

He paused to take a cigar from his case and light it.

"The man seems to have been prepared to trust you pretty far," Dale remarked bluntly.

"I believe I have something of a reputation in Fleet Street for keeping my promise," Theale replied dryly, and the Assistant Commissioner coloured.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I am afraid we get so used to dealing with——"

"Crooks," Sir Peter put in. "I'm not offended. Anyhow, there it is. That was his offer, and I accepted it. An hour later a District Messenger handed in an envelope, addressed to me and sealed with red wax on which was some device I did not look at very closely. The envelope was made of the same kind of paper as you found under poor Pettigrew's nails.

"To tell you the truth, I was not greatly impressed

with the affair, but I gave the man my promise on the off-chance of his really having something big up his sleeve. I was in my room when the envelope was delivered, and I brought it in here to Pettigrew, for it was about six o'clock in the evening. He had come on duty at a little before four. Pettigrew was not much impressed, either; he said the man was probably a lunatic of sorts, although he admitted it was a bit out of the usual run of things. I gave him the envelope and asked him to put it in his safe, and then I forgot all about it until you showed me those bits of paper."

Sir Peter, having told his story, leaned back in his chair with the relief of a man who hated long speeches, and awaited comments.

Dale was the first to break the silence.

"Did you tell any one else about it?" he asked.

"Not a soul," Theale replied.

"Do you think Pettigrew did?"

"I am almost certain he did not. In the first place, there was no reason why he should. In the second place, Pettigrew was one of the closest men I've ever met. He was a great hand at letting other people talk, while he did the listening—eh, Doyle?"

"Absolutely, sir," the crime reporter agreed. "If I may say so, he'd have been more likely to tell me about it than anybody else, as it's up my street, and he certainly never gave me the least hint about it."

"Doyle being our crime man," Sir Peter remarked, "he was naturally told anything that might be useful in his line."

"One moment," Furlong interrupted; "I don't quite get that. How do you know the letter had anything to do with a crime?"

"Oh, didn't I explain that? Sorry. You see, the man who telephoned said he could only tell me that it had to do with the exposure of certain illegal proceedings, but

his reason for asking for three days' delay was that he was not certain whether things would turn out as he expected."

"Then why didn't he wait until he was sure?"

"I asked him that, and his reply was rather startling. He said he was not sure whether he would be alive at the end of the three days. I'm afraid I smiled when he said that, but I'm not sure that I feel so much like smiling now. Anyhow, there's the story; you can make what you like of it."

His audience proceeded to make what they liked of it for quite a number of minutes.

Then Hubert Dale stood up.

"Well," he said, "I think I'll go along to the Yard. Reed will see to the medical examination and the removal of Pettigrew's body, and all that, and you may be sure we'll do our best to clear up the business."

"Thanks," Sir Peter returned. "You don't mind if I retain Furlong to act for me?"

"Not in the least. He knows that, of course."

When Dale had gone, Furlong walked with Reed into the room in which the dead man had been found. While the Sergeant gave certain instructions to the constable at the door, Richard entered and looked meditatively round him. Then he spent a minute or two in the adjoining room, keeping well clear of the wet paint.

He returned to Sir Peter's room as a new voice was heard—that of the divisional police surgeon. He had been out when first called, and as Pettigrew was only too obviously beyond aid, there had been no object in calling in another medical man.

Furlong stood by while the doctor made his preliminary examination. Then he returned to Pettigrew's room, where Sir Peter was still sitting in the dead man's chair, staring moodily at the fire.

He looked up as Richard entered.

"Well," he asked; "what next?"

"It's a queer business," Richard replied.

"If that's all you have to say——" Theale began testily, but Richard, who knew his man, cut him short.

"It isn't," he retorted; "and if you want me to act for you, don't bite my head off."

"Sorry. I—I liked Pettigrew, and——"

"I know. That's all right."

"Tell me," said Theale; "what do you think of that affair of the sealed letter? I suppose I was right to tell the Yard people about it?"

"Of course. They had a right to know."

"I mean, perhaps I ought to have told you first?"

"Doesn't make any difference. I should have told them at once. By the way, I may as well make my position clear. When I take up any case it is on the clear understanding that I have absolute discretion to tell the Yard anything I may think fit when it concerns what I may call a public crime—murder, for instance."

"But, of course. Why shouldn't you?"

"Only that in some cases the people concerned are not too keen on having things come out."

"You're not suggesting that I——?"

"I'm not suggesting anything. I only want you to understand that it's mainly because the Yard people know that I'm straight with them that they are always ready to give me any help they can."

"My dear Furlong, you have a perfectly free hand."

"Thanks. Now, about this man Doyle, your chief crime reporter. Smart fellow, I suppose, or he wouldn't hold that job?"

"Smartest in London."

"Good. Could you spare him for a bit?"

"You can have the whole staff if you like, if I have to close down the paper. What do you want him to do?"

"I'll tell him that when I know it myself. Frankly, I

don't know the first thing about newspaper work, and he may be useful in various ways."

"Right. I'll send for him. Or, if you don't mind, we'll go and look for him. The fact is, I want to let Vincent, the Chief Sub-Editor, have this room. At present he's trying to carry on the Night Editor's job in his own place, and it's a nuisance."

He led the way to the great room where the sub-editors worked, and Richard looked about him with the interest of a layman as he followed.

It was a large space rather than a room, for it was divided from the corridor that ran round the whole floor by a low partition, and by a similar partition from the space in which the reporters lived. On one side a wood and glass partition, reaching to the ceiling, screened off the Tape Room, as it was called, where clicking machines, like electric typewriters, turned out long sheets of paper on which were recorded happenings in almost every quarter of the globe.

The sub-editors sat in groups, according to the work they did; the "Home" men, dealing with the affairs of the United Kingdom; certain specialists, skilled in the antics of the grain markets, the movements of shipping and other topics; and the "Foreign" men, who pretended to know the first names and private habits of all the princes, politicians and crooks of the world beyond the seas. These people seized avidly on the matter sent them from agencies, reporters and special correspondents, and made it into concise stories, ready to be set up in type when passed by the Chief Sub-Editor. They said privately that they made the appalling crudities of the reporters into bright and readable narratives; the reporters said that the sub-editors possessed a genius for ruining a good story by eliminating from it every trace of originality.

Over them ruled the Chief Sub-Editor, an autocrat

who sat at an enormous writing table, the vastness of which was supposed to indicate the comprehensive nature of his duties. His minions regarded it as a convenient place on which he could mislay urgent "copy"—as written, printed, telegraphed or typed news of any description was broadly called.

Above the heads of these wage-slaves—and of the Sports Editor and his assistants (who occupied another corner), and the reporters and other people—ran a sort of aerial railway that seemed to have solved the problem of perpetual motion, for it never stopped. The "carriages" of the railway were appliances in the nature of iron hands, which travelled sedately along the railway and now and then swooped into steel baskets placed at desk-level, snatched up a batch of copy. and carried it off to the Tape Room to be put into a pneumatic tube and shot up to the composing room or such other place as might be appointed.

The guides who took parties of visitors round the building at stated times pointed out this railway with pride. Gramophone records of the remarks made by the foreman printer and other officials when one of the iron hands relaxed its grip and deposited a batch of copy in a little used corridor, or in a hole pierced for the railway's passage through a wall, would, however, have been even more interesting than the guide's spiel.

Mr. James Vincent, the Chief Sub, an alert man with a permanent crease in his forehead and an equally permanent disparaging short cough, was trying to deal with the mass of copy hurled at him by the sub-editors (his normal job) and at the same time to glance at page-proofs brought from the composing room, interview messengers from the Night News Editor, draft contents bills, examine pictures submitted by the Art Room, keep an eye on the proofs of all matter set, argue with the Tame Barrister whose job it was to watch for libels,

and at the same time convey to all who approached him a disappointing estimate of their general intelligence. In the last respect he was superb.

"You had better go into Pettigrew's room," said Sir Peter to this harassed official. "You ought to have gone before."

"I thought I'd wait until I'd seen you," the Chief Sub explained, gathering up his papers.

He called the Deputy Chief Sub, who was also the Copy Taster. The latter odd title was derived from the fact that its owner sat at a desk in front of the Chief Sub, and "tasted" the copy. In other words, all copy from the News Room—apart from foreign or sports matter—came to him. He read it through, marked on it the length, position in the paper and class of headlines required, and passed it out to one of the sub-editors. This he did in accordance with a typewritten list, or forecast, supplied to him when he came on duty; but for the treatment of late news, not foreseen, he was expected to use his own judgment, throwing away what was unimportant, and advising the Night Editor and the Chief Sub of what he gave out for use. His judgment was, in fact, excellent; but it rarely tallied with that of the Big Noises—the proprietor, the News Editor (as distinct from the Night News Editor) and others—who held a daily inquest on the paper the following morning. That was one of the inevitable joys of newspaper work, and made the job of copy-tasting sought after more as a Stepping-Stone to Higher Things than as a permanency.

Richard, watching, was impressed by the smoothness with which the change-over was made.

Vincent said, perhaps, fifty words to Parker, the Copy Taster, and departed to Pettigrew's room.

Parker called up a sub-editor trained in "tasting" and said as many words to him. Then Parker moved

into Vincent's vacant seat, the newcomer took Parker's place, and the great world kept on turning.

Everyone in that room, Richard reflected, knew that their Night Editor had met a violent death a few yards away; yet every man got on with his job, because that is the tradition of Fleet Street. There would be time enough to talk about it when the next edition had gone to press.

Sir Peter glanced over the partition at the reporters' quarters, where Richard saw a diminishing vista of small desks, each with its typewriter and nest of drawers. At some of them men typed furiously; at others, unoccupied men read papers, did cross-word puzzles, or bent anxiously over expense accounts, wondering how many taxi fares and "incidental expenses" the News Editor—a man without illusions—would be likely to pass.

"Come into the News Room," said Theale, and they went to a room across the corridor, where Lambton Miller, the Night News Editor, sat with his assistants.

There had been telephones on half the desks in the sub-editors' department, and more in the reporters' part, besides a sort of kiosk divided into sound-proof cubicles; but Miller had three on his own desk alone. Electric lights of different colours glowed on the wall to indicate the particular instrument on which conversation was required.

"Where's Doyle?" asked Sir Peter—unnecessarily, as it happened, for the crime reporter was talking to one of the other men in a low tone which did not disturb the cloistered peace of the thickly carpeted room. (The sub-editors' floor was covered with a species of brown, india-rubber-like material, very new and expensive; which, however, when the patent floor-heating apparatus was turned on, gave off an odour that was the subject of lurid criticism by those who did not appreciate the scientific achievements of the age in which they lived.)

"Doyle," Theale went on, "Mr. Furlong wants to have a chat with you about one or two things. I think you'd better use Mr. Handley's room. Handley is the Assistant Editor," he explained to Richard; "he's laid up with influenza just now, and not likely to be back for a week or two. You'll be coming here a good bit, I suppose, and it will be convenient for you to have some place of your own."

"Thanks," Richard replied. "That's an excellent idea. Shall we go along there now?"

CHAPTER III

IN Handley's room Richard lit his pipe and sat down.

Sir Peter took another cigar, and handed his case to Doyle.

"Now, Mr. Doyle," said Richard, "I'm going to ask you to do me a favour."

"Of course, if I can," the crime reporter responded.

"Sir Peter has been kind enough to offer to put your services at my disposal in this case, but I want to put it rather differently. Your knowledge of the office and its routine will be most valuable, but there's more in it than that. Frankly, I know something of your record. I took up criminology as a hobby, and made it into something of a business, but you've been at it as a business for half your life. We both want to find out who murdered Pettigrew. Will you help me?"

Doyle's eyes sparkled.

"I'll be delighted," he answered. "To tell you the truth, I was longing to offer to help, but it seemed such cheek."

"Nonsense. You've probably forgotten more than I've learned yet."

Doyle laughed.

"That comes well from the man who found out the secret of the late Baron Karst," he said. "You know it was Mr. Furlong who put the police on the right track there, sir?" he added to Theale.

"Oh, that was mostly luck," Richard interrupted, and Sir Peter smiled as he looked from one to the other.

They made an interesting contrast; the Honourable Richard Furlong, in the early thirties, tall, fair-haired, with steel-blue eyes and a Brigade-of-Guards moustache; younger son of Lord Roodacre, product of Marlborough and Sandhurst; ex-Grenadier Guards officer, war-wounded and winner of the Military Cross. Martin Doyle, aged about forty; dark, clean-shaven, with a sleepy manner belied by keen grey eyes; moving with a surprising alertness for one of his heavy build; the strong, lined face of a man who had fought his way by sheer grit from humble beginnings to the coveted post of chief crime reporter on a paper that set the hardest standard of efficiency in journalism.

Here, Sir Peter told himself, was a combination from which interesting things might be expected.

"That's splendid," Richard went on. "I can see we are going to understand each other. Now, there are quite a lot of things I want to ask you about, but they can wait. First of all I want to stick to the immediate events of the past few hours. I don't know whether you want to wait, Theale——?"

"Don't worry about me," Sir Peter interrupted shrewdly. "I don't think Doyle is afraid to discuss me—if that's what you want to do—in front of my face, any more than he would behind my back."

"You're quite right, sir," the reporter assured him, smiling. "We're all scared stiff of Sir Peter, in a way, when it comes to a row, Mr. Furlong," he explained; "but nobody's *really* afraid of him, because he always

gives you a square deal. Is that frank enough for you, Sir Peter?"

"Quite," said his chief dryly, but it was evident that the reporter's genuine compliment had not displeased him.

"That's that, then," said Richard. "Now, I'd like to have one more word with Miss Farren."

"Just a minute," Theale put in, frowning. "I don't want to make difficulties, but I'd like to make it clear that I have every confidence in Miss Farren. As a matter of fact, her father was an old friend of mine. She is an orphan, and I gave her a job here. She is here on a purely business footing—I mean, she had to make her way like any of the other girls—but she's turned out to be most efficient. She's been my personal secretary for about two years now, and I've never had a better."

"I quite understand," Richard replied. "There's just one question I want to ask her, and then I think we can let her go home."

"Fetch her, Doyle," said Sir Peter, and in a few minutes the girl entered the room.

"Please sit down, Miss Farren," said Richard. "Sorry to bother you, but I won't keep you long."

The girl sat down and regarded him steadfastly.

"I think you told us," Richard went on, "that you went into Sir Peter's room, saw Mr. Pettigrew lying on the floor, and hurried off to Mr. Miller to get help. Is that right?"

"Yes," she answered quietly.

"I can understand what a shock it was, but even in a moment like that one sometimes notices more than one would expect. Tell me, did anything of special significance strike you—apart from the sight of the body?"

"No, nothing."

"Your first thought, of course, was to fetch help?"

"Naturally."

"Quite—but in that case, why did you go into the little room off Sir Peter's room—I believe it is your own office usually—before going to fetch Mr. Miller?"

The girl started, and hesitated momentarily.

"Did I?" she murmured. "Oh yes; I remember now. I went into the little room from force of habit. It is my own room, you see. It has another door leading into the corridor, and I intended to go out that way. Then I saw the paint and things, and remembered that it was being done up, so I came back into Sir Peter's room and went out by his door into the corridor."

Richard nodded.

"Quite so," he said. "That clears that up. It was just a point that puzzled me for a moment, and I thought there might be some little incident you had forgotten that might be of use. That's all, Miss Farren, and thank you very much."

"Run along home and get to bed," said Sir Peter. "You needn't come in to-morrow if you don't feel like it," he added gruffly.

"Oh, I'll be all right, Sir Peter, thank you," she answered. "It—it was rather terrible, you know, but I'm not going to be silly about it."

"Plucky girl, that," Sir Peter remarked when she had gone. "Some women would have been in hysterics by this time."

Doyle was looking puzzled.

"I'd like to know how you knew she'd gone into the small room," he remarked. "She said nothing about it, that I remember."

"It wasn't a great effort," Richard explained. "You saw she was wearing a blue skirt? Well, there was a tiny smear of fresh, light green paint on it. That's all. But we needn't waste time over that."

He strode up and down the room, thinking.

"I'd like to talk to the hall-porter," he said presently.

Doyle lifted the telephone.

"Get Hopkins, the night hall-porter, will you?" he said to the office exchange operator. "Tell him to come to Mr. Handley's room at once."

The hall-porter knocked, entered, and stood to attention with the habit of an ex-soldier.

"This is Mr. Furlong, Hopkins," said Sir Peter. "He's looking into the matter of Mr. Pettigrew's death, and he wants to ask you a few questions."

"Very good, Sir Peter," the man responded.

"What time did you come on duty in the hall?" Richard asked.

"Seven o'clock, sir."

"And you have been on duty ever since?"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't leave for any reason—to get a meal, for instance?"

"No, sir. I bring sandwiches and make myself some cocoa in the little office off the front hall when I'm on night duty, sir."

"Then you would be pretty sure to have seen everyone who passed in and out?"

"Quite sure, sir. The office has a little window looking on the hall, but as it happens I haven't had my meal yet, and I've been about the hall all the time."

"Good. Now, I'm not asking you to mention the names of every person who came in or went out, but I wonder if you can remember any *unusual* caller?"

"I can remember 'em pretty well all, sir, as it happens. I've been more or less expecting some question like that, sir, and the police sergeant asked me the same thing. Sometimes we're very busy, but to-night's been quiet. There was the usual run of gentlemen from the reporting room; then there was the messengers from the news agencies; two or three of the lady reporters—all faces I know, sir. Then there was two gentlemen to see the

Night News Editor; they sent up their names and he saw them, and they came out again. That was all, sir—except, of course, Sir Peter.”

“We’re not talking about when Mr. Furlong and I arrived, man,” Sir Peter put in testily. “It’s *before* that.”

“I understand, Sir Peter,” the man replied. “I mean the *first* time you came in.”

“First time? Are you drunk?”

“No, sir; never been drunk on duty in my life, and I’ve a first-class Army discharge,” the man replied, flushing.

“One moment,” Richard put in. “Let’s get this straight. You say that Sir Peter came into the office during the earlier part of the evening. About what time would that be?”

“I didn’t take particular notice, sir, but I’d say it was about half an hour, or maybe less, before I heard that Mr. Pettigrew had been found dead.”

“Indeed? Just tell us all you can remember about Sir Peter’s visit, will you?”

“Yes, sir. I was standing looking out through the swing doors when I saw Sir Peter coming. I sang out to a lift-boy, and opened the door. Sir Peter walked past me and stepped into the lift. Of course, the boy knew where to take him. About ten minutes later the lift bell rang. I sent the lift up, and Sir Peter came down in it and walked out.”

“Did he speak to you?”

“No, sir.”

“You didn’t ask if he wanted his car, or a taxi?”

“No, sir. If Sir Peter had wanted his car, or a cab, I’d have got a ’phone message from upstairs to call it.”

“Quite. You saw him quite clearly, of course?”

“Well, sir, he had his coat-collar turned up and his hat a bit over his eyes—you’ll excuse me, sir, but that’s how he usually wears ’em.”

"Would you be surprised to hear that Sir Peter was playing cards with me in Pall Mall at the time you say you saw him here?"

Hopkins swallowed audibly, but he met Richard's gaze steadily.

"Of course I take your word for it, sir," he answered doggedly, "but I'd take my Bible oath I saw Sir Peter come into this office and go out again, as I've told you. And that's all I can say, if I'm to be sacked for it this minute."

Richard looked at Theale, who rose and clapped Hopkins on the shoulder.

"It's all right," he said gravely; "you're not going to be sacked. There's something here we don't understand, but I'm sure you're telling us what you believe to be the honest truth."

"I am, Sir Peter, s'elp me."

"All right. Now, look here: just keep this to yourself, will you? Don't tell anybody—not even your wife—what you've just told us."

"I won't breathe it to a soul, Sir Peter. Shall I warn the lift-boy——?"

"Certainly not," Richard put in; "that would make him suspicious at once."

Hopkins departed, to scratch his head over this mystery in the front hall, and Sir Peter thrust his hands into his pockets and frowned.

"This thing is growing more mysterious every minute," he said.

"On the contrary," Richard responded, "I think we've made a pretty big stride towards clearing it up—at least as to how Pettigrew actually met his death. What do you think, Doyle?"

"I agree with you."

"Damned if I see what you're driving at," Sir Peter declared.

"Let's try and figure it out," Richard suggested. "In the first place, when you are working in your room, do you generally use only that desk-lamp, or do you put the ceiling lights on?"

"The desk-lamp; I don't like a glare in my eyes. But what has that to do with it?"

"A good deal. Suppose you are sitting at your table: the desk-lamp is on; there is plenty of light on the table itself, but not too much anywhere else. Now, you want some one—Pettigrew, for instance. What do you do?"

"Telephone for him, of course, or send Miss Farren."

"Leave Miss Farren and the telephone out for the moment; Pettigrew might be speaking on his 'phone, and Miss Farren somewhere else. What other means would you use?"

"Ring my bell and get a messenger from the Tape Room."

"Ah, now we're coming to it. Doyle—do you mind if I drop the 'Mister'? Thank you, and please do the same with me—would you get hold of the man who runs the Tape Room, and explain that I'm handling this business? Just put it vaguely, you know."

Doyle went on his errand, and Richard turned to Theale.

"Don't think me rude if I ask you not to interfere," he said. "I want to handle this in my own way."

"Go ahead."

Johnson, the night superintendent of the Tape Room, came in.

"Oh, good-evening," said Richard pleasantly. "It's just a small point we're trying to clear up about the exact time of Mr. Pettigrew's death. Do you happen to remember Sir Peter sending for a messenger earlier in the evening?"

"Yes, sir," Johnson replied readily. "I remember it

because I was rather surprised to find that Sir Peter was in. He's usually a good bit later."

"Quite so. You didn't see him, of course?"

"No, sir; when his bell rang I sent a boy in."

"Is the boy still here?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish you'd send him along here for a moment, and tell him not to be frightened."

Johnson went out, to return with a sharp-looking lad of about sixteen.

"This is Milligan, sir," he said.

"Oh, Milligan," said Richard, "do you remember answering Sir Peter's bell this evening?"

"Yes, sir," the lad answered without hesitation.

"Sir Peter gave you a message, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir. He said: 'Tell Mr. Pettigrew I want the envelope I gave him to put in his safe.'"

"Exactly. I see you have a good memory. And you gave the message to Mr. Pettigrew?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he gave you the envelope?"

"I think he was going to when he took out his keys to open the safe, but he seemed to change his mind. He said not to wait, as he'd take the envelope to Sir Peter himself."

"Just as I thought," Richard remarked with apparent indifference. "That's all, thank you," and as Johnson shepherded the lad out of the room he added loudly to Sir Peter: "That's a smart boy; you ought to make something of him."

Milligan returned to his duties elated, and the object of the bitter envy of his Tape Room colleagues as he conveyed to them a dark hint that he was a leading figure in the *cause célèbre*.

"Well," Richard went on when the door had closed, "there doesn't seem to be much doubt that you've been

impersonated pretty cleverly, Theale, and the man who did it was well acquainted with your ways, and with your office into the bargain."

Sir Peter stared at him.

"You don't imagine that one of my own people murdered Pettigrew?" he protested.

Richard rose.

"Imagining things never gets one anywhere," he answered. "I'm only stating a fact. Doyle, is it too late for a whisky and soda at my place? No? Then come along. Good-night, Theale; I'll see you to-morrow."

Sir Peter, discomfited, consoled himself by going into Vincent's room and mercilessly criticising the first edition.

CHAPTER IV

RICHARD shivered a little as he and Doyle drove in one of the *Courier's* private cars to his rooms in Jermyn-street.

"Damn cold," he remarked.

"A murder always makes you feel cold," the reporter replied dispassionately.

Richard started.

"Is that so?" he asked. "I haven't had to do with many, but I suppose this is almost a routine business with you?"

"In a way. They don't happen every day, but I've handled a good few. Of course . . . in this case . . . being Pettigrew . . ."

"Quite. It's different. In the ordinary way, I suppose you find them interesting?"

"Oh, yes. Once you have got rid of what I might call the popular idea of murder——"

"What is that, exactly?"

"Well, the idea that a murderer is some special kind of person, quite abnormal—almost inhuman, you know."

"Isn't he?"

"Not a bit. He's acting abnormally, of course, because he finds himself in abnormal circumstances, but the murderers I have met have been very ordinary people."

"That's interesting."

"Everybody is interesting in some way, if you only know enough about them. Only one doesn't notice . . . until they do something that attracts attention——"

"Such as murder," Richard put in, laughing. "Well, here's Jermyn-street and the whisky, thank goodness."

Pratt, Richard's impassive man, soon had them settled in front of a jolly fire, with tumblers filled.

"There are cigars and cigarettes beside you," said Richard; "help yourself," and he proceeded to fill and light his pipe.

They smoked in silence for some minutes.

"What do you know about Pettigrew?" Richard asked presently.

"As much as most people, I suppose, and that's damn all."

"But Sir Peter implied that he was a topping fellow, without an enemy in the world."

Doyle hesitated.

"We are speaking in confidence?" he asked.

"Absolutely. I shall be more than grateful for any hints you care to give me."

"It's like this: Sir Peter is a white man. I've reason to know it, for he gave me my first big chance. For some reason he likes to put on a gruff manner and pretend to be above human weaknesses, but he's always doing good turns to people on the quiet. He's extra-

ordinarily loyal to the people who've, so to speak, grown up with the paper, and Pettigrew was one of them. I'm not saying that Pettigrew was a wolf in sheep's clothing, exactly, but there's no doubt that he knew how to keep on Sir Peter's blind side. For instance, he wasn't as popular with the staff as the Old Man thought he was. If he took dislike to a fellow, he could make his life hell in a quiet way. I don't know if you're familiar with newspaper work——?"

"Don't know the first thing about it."

"Well, a Night Editor who knows his job—and you don't *get* that sort of job without knowing a bit about it—is a pretty powerful person in his way. Every office has its own peculiar rules and customs, of course, but in our show the N.E., once he comes on duty, practically runs the paper. He's under the Editor (Sir Peter acts as Managing Editor) or the Assistant Editor if they happen to be in the office, of course, but even they don't usually interfere in anything except a matter of political policy, or something big like that. Pettigrew couldn't boss the day staff—such blokes as the Foreign Editor or the News Editor, and so on; but the night staff were responsible to him. I'm making this point because I want you to understand how Pettigrew could come into contact with a wide circle of people."

"I follow you. So he was not exactly popular?"

"No. He was a queer fellow, I always thought. Mind you, it's only fair to say that he never did me any harm in his life. I hadn't any grudge against him, and his death shocked me as much as it did anyone else. But if we're going to find out who killed him, we've got to be as frank about his faults as his virtues."

"Certainly; that's perfectly sound."

"I'm glad you see my point. One doesn't much care about running a man down when he's dead. *Nil nisi*—as the leader-writers delight to say."

Richard eyed him shrewdly.

"I'm terribly interested in what you haven't told me," he declared, and Doyle smiled.

"You ought to have been a barrister," he retorted. "Well, honestly, I don't know much about Pettigrew, but I've had an idea for some time that he was a secretive sort of bloke. He was a bachelor, and it isn't so much what he *did* as what he *didn't* do that I'm thinking of. He didn't play golf, he only used his car for going to places—not as a keen motorist, I mean; he didn't play bridge; in fact, as far as I could see, he hadn't a hobby, to use an old-fashioned word. Now, no man of Pettigrew's mental energy can live without some sort of pursuit, apart from his business, if it's only collecting stamps. I don't know that the idea is very helpful, but it's just worth thinking about."

Richard refilled the other's glass.

"Doyle," he said, "let's be honest about this. Do you really *want* to find Pettigrew's murderer?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Simply this: we're beating about the bush instead of coming to the point. It's all very well for me, but it's different for you. We both know that this crime was committed by someone who knew the *Courier* so intimately that he could take a devil of a big risk. I saw how Sir Peter shied away from the mere idea of such a thing. Is that how you feel about it, too? If so, please don't hesitate to say so."

Doyle flung the end of his cigarette into the fire and sat up.

"You're right, of course," he answered slowly. "It is pretty ghastly to think that people you've worked with may be mixed up in a thing like this. It makes you feel . . . a bit sick. But, look here, Furlong: whenever a man is sentenced to death, there are always scores of fools who write to the papers begging for sympathy and

a reprieve for the poor, misguided fellow. They make me sick, and I've often said so. If a fellow commits a crime and gets away with it, good luck to him; if he is caught, let him take his medicine. Someone has killed Pettigrew, and it's your job to catch him. You can count on me to do my damndest to help—though I'm bound to say I'm not too confident we'll succeed."

"Thanks; I think it's very sporting of you, in the circumstances. But why do you think this ought to be more difficult than any other crime?"

"Look at the various angles of it. In the first place, there doesn't seem to be any motive, unless there's anything in that mysterious letter story, which doesn't impress me——"

"There is *always* a motive——"

"Of course there is, but until you find out what it is, it's not easy to get a line to work on."

"That was why you were talking about Pettigrew being secretive?"

"Yes, that was at the back of my mind. Then, again, a man who had the cold nerve to impersonate Sir Peter in his own office must be clever enough to cover up his tracks pretty carefully."

"Half a second," said Richard. "About that impersonation business: it was a cool stroke, of course, but I think you overlook one point. In my view, it would really be less risky for the man—let's call him Mr. Murderer for convenience—it would really be less risky for Mr. Murderer to pose as Sir Peter in the *Courier* office than in a good many other places."

"Why?" Doyle demanded, obviously surprised.

"Because in the *Courier* office Sir Peter is such a well-known figure that people take him for granted. He's a taciturn sort of bloke, and the hall porter, for instance, would see nothing unusual in his walking into the lift and going upstairs without a word. But suppose

it had been the Everyland Hotel, or some place like that. Any official there might know the real Sir Peter and be struck by any little unusual gesture the impersonator might make. I mean, at a place like that the staff are always on the lookout for a possible crook; at the *Courier* office they certainly would not be expecting a bogus Sir Peter. You see my point?"

"I certainly do. That had not occurred to me," Doyle admitted thoughtfully. "Round One goes to you, on points."

"Thanks. Don't think I want to be dogmatic. It is only by arguing things out that we can hope to narrow down the affair to what really matters. What's your next point?"

"My next point is one I didn't care to discuss in front of Sir Peter. Why were you so interested in that smudge of paint on Miss Farren's dress, and her going into the adjoining room?"

"I'll explain that in a minute. First, would you mind telling me what you know about her?"

"Of course. If you're casting her for the rôle of the villainess of the piece, I'm afraid you're mistaken," Doyle replied, smiling. "Angela Farren is one of the few bright spots in our drab life. In fact, she's popularly known as the Golden Angel."

"The Golden Angel? Sounds picturesque. But why?"

"Partly because her name is Angela, and she has that funny sort of golden sheen glinting in her hair. You may have noticed it?"

"I did. Very pretty, too. And——?"

"And—it's a big 'and,' too—she's such a perfect little brick. It's her job to summon to the Presence any wretched fellow who's due for a choking-off from Sir Peter. The Old Man's chokings-off can be pretty thorough, believe me! The younger blokes, who don't realise how much worse his bark is than his bite, feel

their guts quivering when the Angel floats along and says, 'Oh, Mr. So-and-so, Sir Peter would be glad to see you in his room at five o'clock, please.'"

"I shouldn't have thought that job would have made her very popular," Richard commented, and Doyle grinned.

"That's where her angelic side comes in," he explained. "She's got a marvellous knack of keeping sinners out of the Old Man's way while he's 'all het up,' as the Americans say. When she does usher the criminal into the Presence, you can bet Sir Peter has had his tea and muffin and is smoking his cigar—in fact, that he's in as good a humour as she can manage. And if anybody wants his salary raised, or any little thing like that, he goes to the Golden Angel to see how the land lies before he sends in his application."

"The complete fairy godmother," Richard remarked. "Sir Peter's rather fond of her, isn't he?"

"He's not in love with her, if that's what you mean," Doyle answered bluntly. "Unless it's as a sort of a daughter, that is. I think he'd adopt her to-morrow if she'd let him, but she's an independent little person, and she holds her job because she's so jolly efficient, not because she's a favourite of his."

"Does she smoke?" asked Richard, and Doyle raised his eyebrows at the unexpected question.

"Yes," he replied; "why?"

"I suppose you don't happen to know what brand of cigarettes she prefers?"

"I do, as it happens. We all do, if it comes to that. Fellows often try to give her presents, but the only thing she'll accept is a few cigarettes. She smokes Turkish—the Hassan Effendi brand."

"I know them; they're plain, without tips, aren't they?"

"Yes."

Richard took an envelope from his pocket and carefully extracted from it a small, white object, which he handed to Doyle.

"That's the end of a smoked cigarette, as you see," he said. "It's a Knight rider—the brand that has a little cardboard tip to keep the tobacco from your lips. There are several similar brands, but that's a Knight rider, all right."

"No doubt of it," Doyle agreed. "Where did you find it?"

"I found it in Miss Farren's room—the one that is being decorated, adjoining Sir Peter's room."

Doyle's face had grown very grave.

"What's your idea?" he asked.

"Well, it's only an idea, and I needn't ask you to keep it to yourself. On Sir Peter's writing-table I noticed a tiny burn. Now, he rarely smokes cigarettes. Also, you know how methodical he is. I can't see him laying a burning cigarette on his desk when there is a perfectly good ashtray there—and I can't see any of his staff doing it, either, if he were there. I found this cigarette end in the little room, you remember. I don't say it's impossible that one of the painters threw it there, but it's unlikely. Men of that type usually smoke Woodbines or 'gaspers.'"

"You don't think it was Angela Farren who killed Pettigrew?"

"No. She's a well-built girl, but the blow that killed Pettigrew needed a stronger arm than hers, I think—although, of course, you never know. But I am wondering whether Miss Farren, when she saw Pettigrew lying dead, also noticed this cigarette end, and threw it into the other room to divert suspicion from some other person. There was not a coal fire in Sir Peter's room, and, if I am right, she probably thought the cigarette end would never be noticed when the little

room was cleaned after the painters had finished their work."

Doyle examined the cigarette butt.

"What about finger-prints?" he exclaimed. "You ought not to have let me handle it," but Richard shook his head.

"No good," he answered; "I was a fool not to have thought of that at first. It had fallen into some whitish dust—from whitewash, probably—and when I picked it up I dusted it with my own fingers in the instinctive way one does that sort of thing. Then, of course, I kicked myself for having done it, but by that time I'd destroyed any prints that may have been on it."

He looked curiously at Doyle, who was still gazing absently at the cigarette end.

"Tell me," he said, "do you know anyone in the *Courier* office who smokes the Knightrider brand?"

The reporter nodded.

"I'm afraid I do," he admitted.

"Who is it?"

"Terry Vance, one of the reporters."

"That's interesting."

"On the other hand," Doyle reminded him, "in a staff as big as ours there may be a dozen other people who smoke Knightriders."

"I agree, but the whole staff doesn't work on the editorial floor. Is Miss Farren in love with this man Vance?"

"Dashed if I know. I think most of the fellows have been keen on her at some time, but she's simply good pals with everybody, so far as I know."

"Good-looking fellow, Vance?"

"Not bad."

"What do you think of him?"

"Can't say I care for him a lot, but that's nothing against him. To be honest, I suppose the fact that I've

had a bit of a struggle myself has rather put me against these public-school-and-Varsity youths who are crowding into newspaper work now. They don't know what it is to work a dozen hours a day and seven days a week on a small provincial paper, learning their job. Of course, things are changing now, even in the provinces, but some of us feel that this gilded youth business isn't doing the profession any good. I know that was Pettigrew's view."

"Indeed? Did he ever tell Vance that, do you know?"

"I should think it would be likely enough. He'd a habit of sending for reporters, though they're technically under the News Room, and telling them off if he thought their stories weren't good enough. Only the other day, in fact, he gave young Vance a pretty severe jumping-on, so one of the other men told me."

"So Vance would naturally have a grudge against Pettigrew?"

"Good lord!" cried Doyle, in sudden horror. "I see what you're getting at. I wasn't suggesting for one moment that Vance would kill Pettigrew. He's got a nasty temper at times, but murder——"

"That's all right," Richard cut in. "Of course it's rotten for you to have to talk about the *Courier* men like this; but after all, we've got to face the facts."

"Well, there's one fact I've got to face," said Doyle, standing up, "and that is, that it's devilish late. I'll get along now, and please do understand that I want to help, even if it's——"

"Damned unpleasant! Thanks, Doyle. I'll see you to-morrow at the *Courier* office, then?"

"Right. What time?"

"Shall we say eleven? I want to make one or two calls first."

"Good enough. Cheer-ho."

Richard saw him out. Then, returning to his arm-

chair, he took up the cigarette end and regarded it thoughtfully. To-morrow, he promised himself, he would see this young Terry Vance—and also the Golden Angel.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Richard Furlong decided to make his hobby into a definite occupation, he firmly refused to call himself, or to be called, a private detective.

This was not because he considered the term unworthy of the son of a peer. On the contrary, it was just because he felt that the man in the street had a right to regard a private detective as a person who had had at least some sort of official connection with the detection of crime—although he knew that in many cases this view was, unfortunately, unfounded.

Richard, however, would sail under no false colours. He was prepared to undertake a "criminological investigation," and though his set had pulled his leg unmercifully at first, the tone changed when it began to leak out that he had handled with remarkable success a certain case in which the father of a wild young fellow had been anxious to extricate his son from a mess without calling in the police.

Richard quietly stuck to his job. He was helped by his three years of travel after the War—recuperating after a bullet in the lungs—during which personal influence had allowed him to see a good deal of the methods of the police of other countries. At Scotland Yard they regarded him at first with amused tolerance. Hubert Dale, the Assistant Commissioner, had been at Marlborough with Richard, and goodnaturedly gave him one or two hints.

Presently, however, Richard was able to supply the Yard with a valuable piece of information he had stumbled on, and it was then he first met Detective-Sergeant Reed.

It was, however, his discoveries in the amazing case of Baron Karst, which involved the disappearance of State papers of the gravest importance, that established Richard as a valued outside collaborator, and it was for that reason that Dale and Reed had not sniffed at his appearance in the Pettigrew case.

The murder of the Night Editor presented, Richard suspected, a problem more difficult of solution than at first appeared. It was easy enough to think of a dozen explanations, but there were features about the case that seemed to him to call for a good deal of consideration.

There was that girl, Angela Farren. An interesting young person, he told himself, as he ate his breakfast before going to the *Courier* office.

She had told her story simply and with a remarkable degree of self-possession. The only hint of hesitation she had shown had been when he asked her to explain why she had gone into the little room which was being decorated. It was a small matter. Richard had learned to appreciate the tremendous importance that may attach to what seems to be a trifle; but he had also learned an even more important lesson—the danger of over-estimating what is in fact unimportant.

Pettigrew's murder had taken him into a world of which he knew practically nothing, but he counted himself fortunate in having Martin Doyle at his disposal to educate him in its manners and customs.

Doyle, he knew, was a shrewd and experienced criminologist. Against that, of course, was the natural and almost unconscious reluctance of the crime reporter to suspect the people who were his colleagues, who worked beside him and belonged, like himself, to a

fraternity which, although often torn by petty jealousies, could unite in a warm charity to any member in dire need of sympathy and help.

But Richard relied on two things: Doyle's keen professional interest in crime, and his obvious horror at the death of a colleague, planned and executed with a cunning that jarred even his hardened nerves.

It was exactly eleven o'clock when Richard arrived at the *Courier* office and gave his name to the chief hall porter, who was in charge during the day. That worthy, a burly, grey-haired man named Bullock, at whose nod assistant porters and lift-boys trembled, and to whom even cable companies' messenger boys were respectful, received Richard with *empressement*. He paid him the unheard of compliment of accompanying him up to Mr. Handley's room, where he explained the uses of the telephones and bells provided for the convenience of the Assistant Editor.

"Anything you may wish for, sir," said Mr. Bullock magnificently, "you have only to ask for, and it shall be got. Sir Peter told me to see that you had everything you wanted."

The thing that Richard wanted most at the moment was to have Mr. Bullock clear out and leave him alone, but he replied in courteous terms.

"I shall be in the front hall," added the porter, with a full sense of the favour he was conferring. "Name of Bullock. If you require any information, I shall be pleased to attend to it personally."

Richard expressed his acknowledgments. When Mr. Bullock had not so much gone as withdrawn his presence, Richard pressed his Tape Room bell, and a small boy appeared.

"What time does Sir Peter hold the morning conference?" Richard asked, although he knew quite well.

"Eleven o'clock, sir."

"I see. Then I won't disturb him just now. I'll talk to his secretary."

"Miss Farren, sir? Shall I fetch her?"

"No. I'll see her myself presently. What is the number of the room she is using?"

"Number 27, sir; straight down this corridor and round the corner to the right."

"Thank you."

When the boy had gone, Richard left the room, walked down the corridor and found Number 27 without difficulty, for every room had its number on the door.

He knocked, and a girl's voice bade him enter.

Angela Farren was sitting at a table laden—but not littered—with papers, the orderly arrangement of which Richard noted with approval. Here was a young woman, evidently, who handled her work methodically. Two telephones were on the table, and a typewriter stood on a small desk near. A bowl of fresh winter flowers made a pleasant spot of colour.

"Oh, good-morning," said Angela, and was about to stand up.

"Please sit down, Miss Farren," Richard entreated. "I haven't come to worry you. I'm learning to find my way about the place, you know, and I thought I'd call in and say 'Good-morning' to you. Are you frightfully busy?"

She smiled.

"The efficient secretary would reply that we are always busy here," she answered. "As a matter of fact, I can't do much now until conference is finished."

"Conference," Richard repeated; "ah, yes; the meeting of the great intellects who will tell us to-morrow how the world has got to be run. By the way, I saw a fellow smoking in the corridor; may I?"

"Of course."

"Thanks."

He felt in one pocket after another. Angela opened a drawer, took out a cigarette case and offered it to him.

"Oh, I say, that's awfully nice of you," he said, taking the case and opening it.

There were half a dozen cigarettes inside, each with a tip like that he had found in the half-decorated room; they were Knightriders.

Richard lit one, the girl refusing to join him.

"Rather jolly, these tips," he remarked easily; "I haven't tried them before."

"I generally smoke Turkish," she answered indifferently. "Somebody told me these were better for your throat, so I tried them, but I can't say I care for them much."

Richard glanced again at the case as he handed it back.

"I see you play Badminton," he remarked.

"What? Oh, the case, of course. Yes, I won a tournament and this was the prize. Sheer luck, really. The girl who ought to have won it got 'flu just before the final."

Badminton, Richard reflected, is a game that develops the muscles of the arm and wrist quite a lot. The lamp that felled Pettigrew was heavy, of course, but still . . .

The door opened and a young fellow burst in, and stopped abruptly at the sight of Richard.

"Come in," said the girl calmly, though her colour deepened a shade, Richard thought. "Mr. Furlong, let me introduce Mr. Vance. Terry, this is Mr. Furlong."

The men exchanged greetings, and Richard eyed the newcomer with unobtrusive interest.

Terry Vance was a tall, athletic-looking young man of about twenty-five, with fair hair brushed back in what seemed to be a natural wave. His manner was briskly cheerful, but it struck Richard that the cheerfulness was, perhaps, a trifle overdone. He was clean-

shaven, and had one of the prominent, cleft chins that more often indicate weakness than strength.

"'Fraid I've butted in," said Vance; "didn't know you were busy——"

"We're not," Richard assured him. "Or rather, Miss Farren was kind enough to pretend that she didn't mind my wasting her time, when I expect she really wants me to clear out and let her get on with her job. I was going to look for Mr. Doyle. He promised to show me round, but if you've got ten minutes to spare, Mr. Vance, and could put up with me——?"

"Of course," Vance replied hurriedly. "Delighted. What did you want to see?"

"Whatever you suggest. It's all so interesting. We outsiders don't realise what a huge organisation there is behind the paper we pay our penny for." He turned to Angela. "Now that I've found another victim, I'll leave you in peace, Miss Farren," he added, smiling, and he and Vance left the room.

The door shut, he laid a detaining hand on Vance's arm.

"The fact is," he said gravely, "I'm trying to help in clearing up the mystery of Pettigrew's death, and I want to meet as many of your people as possible. I know you'll all do anything you can to help me."

Vance flushed.

"We certainly will!" he responded. "It's a ghastly business. I don't mind telling you I—well, to be honest with you, Pettigrew and I didn't always hit it off, if you can use such an expression about a Night Editor and a mere reporter. But he was a great fellow in many ways, and it's horrible to think of his being done in like that."

"Horrible!" Richard assented, wondering with a private sigh how many more times he would have to go through the same formula. "Did you know him at all outside the office?"

"No," Vance answered. "At least, not to say know him. I'd seen him once or twice in—in places where people go, you know," he added vaguely.

Richard did not press the point.

They had begun to walk down the corridor. A door opened suddenly and a messenger boy hurried out and collided with Vance.

"Damn and blast you!" cried the young man, in sudden fury. "Why the hell don't you look where you're going?"

"Beg your pardon, Mr. Vance; didn't see you, sir," the boy apologised.

"All right," Vance muttered, and turned to Richard somewhat shamefacedly.

"Little devils, those boys," he said.

"I seem to have heard of a 'printer's devil' before," Richard answered, and they both laughed. "Huge place you've got here," Richard went on.

"Pretty decent," the reporter assented. "By the way, have you seen the reference library?"

"No."

"Come in here, then. It's rather interesting; supposed to be one of the best in the world."

They entered a big room in which were huge book-cases, cabinets containing card indices, great files of newspapers, maps, globes, and tables at which studious-looking young women were working. The young women, however, were not too studious to refrain from the ritualistic hair-pat as the two men stood looking about them.

"This is the place where you come if you want to know anything about anything or anybody," Vance explained.

"Sounds useful," Richard commented.

"It is." Vance whispered something to a youth at the counter, and went on: "Suppose a reporter has to

go and see a scientist about radium, or wireless waves, or how many million vitamins there are in a cabbage, or something bright like that. Well, he comes in here and they tell him where the scientific brute lives, and what train to take to get there, and what he said in 1894, and so on. Or say he wants to find out all about the career of a banker, or an actress, or a politician or other criminal: in he comes, and they hand him out a wad of cuttings about the party in question."

"Cuttings?"

"Yes; they've got bits cut out of all sorts of newspapers for years and years past, all classified. They're about people and things—reports of trials, accounts of discoveries, gossip, all kinds of junk. For instance, look here":

He grinned as he took an envelope the clerk had just brought from a great cabinet full of small drawers. It was oblong in shape, rather larger than foolscap size, and made of a whitish material like thin cardboard. On one side was the typewritten endorsement:

FURLONG, Hon. Richard
(See also ROODACRE, Lord)

Richard took out a small wad of newspaper cuttings, each stamped with a date and the initials of the journal from which it had been taken. He coloured as his eye caught a headline:

PEER'S SON WINS MILITARY CROSS
GALLANT TRENCH EXPLOIT

and he thrust the cuttings back into their envelope.

"Heavens!" he said. "I'd no idea you kept things like that."

"They've hundreds of thousands of envelopes," Vance assured him. "It's one of the rottenest things about modern journalism, all this poking into people's private affairs. I say it, although I'm a reporter. The public are always screaming about newspaper publicity, but if they really didn't want it, they wouldn't buy the papers. News values have all changed. What I mean is: suppose you get one of those floods they have in China every now and then. About half a million human beings are drowned. 'They're only Chinks,' says someone in authority, and the story gets five lines in the paper, or is chucked away altogether if there's pressure on space, as there usually is. But if the Duke of Dogsbody breaks his braces in Regent-street, and has to dash into a shop to get them mended—my hat! what a fuss there is! There's a double-column picture of the Duke, with the Duchess and a 'doggie friend.' Then there's the main story of the frightful occurrence, as told by a policeman who held up the traffic while the Duke crossed the road. Then there's an interview with the Duke, taking a cocktail in his club while recovering from the shock, with ingredients of the special cocktail he prefers. Then, of course, there's an interview with the proprietor of the shop he dashed into. 'I have had the honour of supplying the nobility for twenty-five years, as my father did before me,' he says, 'but I never remember such a distressing affair before. His Grace was wonderful. He joked with the assistants who removed the broken braces, just as if nothing had happened.' Then there are a few lines headed, 'WHY DO BRACES BREAK?' by a leading manufacturer, and an interview with a prominent dress reform faddist on the absurdity of wearing such things at all. And, of course, a couple of paragraphs in the 'SOCIAL LOOKING-GLASS' column about the Duke and his polo-ponies, and the Duchess and her great efforts in

the cause of needy night-club aunties. That's called *doing the story well*."

Richard disturbed the cloistered calm of the library with a guffaw.

"I say, you're pretty severe, aren't you?" he suggested, and Vance shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"When you know us all better," he said, "you'll know that every man on a newspaper knows how to run it better than all the rest put together. At least, he thinks he does. But you shouldn't let me guff so much. Come on and see something else."

Outside the library they encountered Martin Doyle.

"Oh, I was looking for you," he said. "I didn't know——"

"Mr. Vance is very kindly showing me round," Richard explained. "Do come along with us."

Doyle nodded ungraciously.

Vance, with sudden stiffness, inquired what Mr. Furlong would like to see next.

Richard looked at his watch.

"It is the witching hour," he announced, "when—various things happen. Among others, the pubs open in this neighbourhood, I believe. Let's go and have a drink. You probably know a quiet place, Doyle?"

Doyle knew a quiet place.

CHAPTER VI

EVEN the most bitter opponents of alcohol do not deny its soothing effect.

The atmosphere had thawed considerably by the time the second whisky and soda was reached, and then Richard spoke with purposeful abruptness of Pettigrew's murder.

"I want all the help I can," he said; "and if either of you fellows can think of anything likely to be useful, please tell me."

Doyle shot a quick glance at him.

"Only too glad," he murmured discreetly, and waited.

Vance played nervously with an unlighted Knight-rider cigarette he had taken from his case.

"It gave me a horrible shock," he muttered, half to himself.

"When you saw him lying there, you mean?" Richard suggested.

Vance nodded; then, as he realised the full significance of the words, he sat up, his mobile lips working.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I mean that you were the first person to find Pettigrew."

Vance sprang up, but Richard caught his arm and pushed him back into his chair.

"Steady!" he said; "don't make a scene."

Vance pulled himself together, though his hands shook.

"I don't understand——" he began.

"You understand perfectly," Richard interrupted.

"You went into Sir Peter's room and saw Pettigrew

lying there. You were so startled that you laid your cigarette on the table and bent over the body, but you were careful not to touch it. Then it occurred to you that you were known to have quarrelled with Pettigrew, and you were afraid of being accused of murdering him, so you slipped away and said nothing."

"How did you know?" Vance asked hoarsely.

"You forgot your cigarette," said Richard, and went on quickly: "Why on earth didn't you call somebody? You must see——"

"I see what you're thinking," Vance broke in. "All right! Have me arrested, blast you! I'll go quietly—I believe that's the proper jargon, isn't it? Anyhow, it doesn't matter much."

"Don't be a fool!" Richard admonished him gruffly.

"What—aren't you going to——?"

"I'm not a policeman, and when I propose to have you arrested I shan't ask you to have a drink with me first."

"Then you don't think I killed him?" cried Terry eagerly.

"I don't—but I tell you frankly that I'm not sure—and I don't know whether I ought not to tell the police what you've just admitted."

"Don't be an ass, Vance," Doyle put in. "I know you don't like me, and I can't say I care a lot about you, to put it brutally; but I don't want to see you running your head into a rope for something I don't believe you did. It's damn decent of Furlong to treat you like this, and the least you can do is to tell him everything you can."

Vance emptied his glass.

"All right," he said. "I know I've been a fool. I'm always doing things in a hurry and being sorry for them afterwards. I'd had a row with Pettigrew. Everybody knew it. I said things about him afterwards—

threats, I suppose you'd call them, though I didn't really mean them. I kept on thinking about the row, and at last I worked myself up into such a state that I decided to resign. I didn't wait to write. I was in the corridor and I saw a light in Sir Peter's room, so I went in to give the Old Man my resignation and—and say things about Pettigrew. Then I saw Pettigrew on the floor. He was dead. I got the wind up—thought everybody would think I'd done it—and bolted. That's all there is to it."

Richard filled his pipe and lit it before replying.

"When you saw Pettigrew, what was it he had in his hand?" he asked suddenly.

"He'd nothing in his hand," Vance replied, obviously astonished.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure? My God, I'm not likely to forget how he looked! I can see him now," and he shuddered.

"You told me some time ago that you had met Pettigrew once or twice outside the office. Where was that?"

"I didn't exactly meet him," Vance answered, with some hesitation. "I saw him, but I don't think he saw me."

"Where did you see him?"

"It was in a—a card-playing show."

"In plain words, a gambling-house?"

"Yes."

"You go in for that sort of thing?"

"I did—and got into a mess. But I've chucked it all now."

"I didn't know Pettigrew cut that sort of a shine," Doyle remarked.

"Neither did I," Vance agreed. "I was amazed, especially as it was a pretty bad place. But he was a secretive sort of fellow."

"Vance," Richard put in, "I'm going to ask you a very personal question."

"Go ahead."

"Are you in love with Miss Farren?"

Terry flushed angrily.

"I don't see why we have to drag her name into it," he answered stiffly.

"Unfortunately, I do."

"Good Heavens, man, you're not suggesting——?"

"I'm not suggesting; I'm asking. If you don't want to answer my question, I can't make you; but if you want me to help you, you must let me do it in my own way."

"Help me?"

"Certainly," Richard answered dryly. "It appears to me that the police have had just as much opportunity to find things out as I have, and they have a way of arresting a man first and discussing things with him afterwards."

"Sorry," said Vance humbly. "I am in love with Angela," he admitted. "I've asked her half a dozen times to marry me, if you must know."

"But she refused?"

"Yes. She—well, she knew some of the silly things I'd done, you see. It was partly for that reason I was cutting out all that sort of thing and trying to get on with my job."

"I see. Tell me, did she allow you to give her presents?"

"Only a few cigarettes now and then, like everybody else."

"When did you last give her any?"

"Yesterday afternoon, as it happens."

"What sort?"

"Turkish; that's what she always smokes. But why——?"

Richard leaned forward.

"If I tell you something that will show you what a damned sight luckier fellow you are than you deserve to be," he said, "will you give me your word to keep it to yourself?"

"I will, I swear."

"Then you may be interested to know that when Miss Farren found Pettigrew's body she also found the end of your cigarette. She recognised the brand you smoked, and promptly hid the butt for fear you'd be suspected."

"The devil she did! Isn't she a wonder? But, I say, did she tell you this?"

"She did not, and if you let her know that I've told you, you can take the consequences."

"I won't, of course; but how did you know, then?"

"That's my business. But I'll tell you something else. Miss Farren is a very clever girl. Something I said to her last night must have made her suspicious, so this morning she got some of those Knightrider cigarettes you smoke, and put them in her own case. I saw them there before you came in—in fact, she offered me one."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Terry, and then gave a wry smile at his own words. "At least, it seems to depend on you whether I shall be or not."

Richard did not smile.

"It may depend on other people as well," he answered gravely. "Look here, Vance: I make no promise as to what I may or may not do, but I'm giving you a sporting chance. Don't let me down. Keep what we've said under your hat. Stick to your job and keep out of trouble, and wait until you hear from me. I may have something for you to do later on."

Vance rose.

"I won't try to thank you," he said. "I can't, but——"

"That's all right. Shove along now. You've probably got some work to do?"

"Yes; as a matter of fact, I've got to interview a man."

"The Duke of Dogsboddy?"

"No, not as bad as that; only a scientific brute," and he summoned up the ghost of a smile as he went out.

Doyle drew a long breath, ordered two more whiskies and sodas, and imbibed a respectable portion of his own before he spoke.

"Well," he said, "that's the luckiest young man I've come across for a pretty long time."

"How's that?"

"How? In the first place, if he'd said as much to Reed as he said to you, he'd be in a nice, clean cell by this time."

"Perhaps; but there will always be one vacant if it's needed. There's plenty of time."

Doyle stared at him.

"But you don't think he's guilty, do you?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact, I don't," Richard admitted, "but I may be wrong. It's just as stupid to be sure of a man's innocence as his guilt. I've made that mistake before. What's your opinion, apart from professional sympathy, and all that?"

"I don't think he did it," the reporter declared, "and that's certainly not personal bias, as I think you realise. You saw how he went to pieces when you questioned him. Besides, how about the impersonation of Sir Peter?"

"As to that, Vance could have disguised himself as easily as anyone else—more easily than some, perhaps. He's that theatrical type."

"What about the mysterious sealed letter?"

Richard frowned.

"Damn that letter!" he muttered. "It's always cropping up and interfering with one's pet theories."

Doyle could not help smiling as he reflected that the Honourable Richard Furlong, for all his reputation as a criminologist, did not seem to be pushing his head through a brick wall with any greater success than the police.

Richard caught the smile.

"Yes, I'm up against it for the moment," he confessed, "but one nearly always arrives at that point sooner or later. When I get stumped, I do what hounds do when they lose the scent: cast round until I find it again."

He stood up and put on his hat.

"I'd meant to suggest a bite of lunch together," he went on, "but I've just remembered a thing I must do. Shall we meet at the office about three?"

When he had gone, Doyle sat on for some time, deep in thought. Then he went down to the Press Club, passed the time of day with the usual crowd at the bar, and sat down to a chop.

Having eaten, he watched the clock; then went out and made his way to Fleet Street.

He knew that Angela Farren, when Sir Peter's movements and her own work permitted, often lunched at a snug little restaurant near the Law Courts.

Sure enough, he presently saw her emerge from the place, and hailed her.

"I say, Angel," he said, "got a minute to spare? I want to talk to you."

A note in his voice made her look searchingly at him.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It's about Pettigrew," he answered gravely. "I can't tell you here. Let's go into the Temple. I shan't keep you long."

He led the way down Middle Temple Lane and into a deserted corner near the cloisters.

"Look here," he said, "I'm going to be frank : I want to talk about Vance."

The girl caught her breath.

"What about him?" she asked quickly.

"It's no time to stand on ceremony," he answered. "I know he's in love with you. Everybody knows that. Has it occurred to you that—that other people might be in love with you, too?"

Angela coloured, and he hurried on before she could reply :

"You know what I mean, and I won't ask you to answer that question. I'm not trying to make a bargain with you. I only want you to know that I care enough for you to want to help. I'm not trying to do the chivalrous stunt, and I don't pretend to be friendly to Vance. You may be going to marry him, or you may not. I don't ask you to tell me that, either. But I may as well say that I know all about your finding that cigarette——"

She interrupted him, her face white and set.

"Do *you* think he murdered Mr. Pettigrew?" she demanded.

"No, I don't," he answered; "but I'm bound to tell you that other people may not be of the same opinion. Let's be quite honest : Vance *may* have killed Pettigrew; you know how hasty he is. On the other hand, he may not. That's what even his friends will say."

"He didn't!" she cried.

"Very well; let's agree on that. But it's another thing to prove it. All I ask is that you'll trust me. I'm quite selfish in the matter, Angel. I'm not doing this for Vance. I want to help you because I love you. You knew that already, of course. Women always know . . . but it isn't the time to talk about that now. Later

on, perhaps, I'll try and persuade you to listen to me. But be careful, my dear. That was a clever move of yours about the cigarette, but I'm afraid Furlong saw through it. Why not let me——?"

"Wait a moment," she broke in. "I'm grateful—indeed I am. But you can't be on both sides at once. You're with Mr. Furlong in this, and——"

"And you don't trust me?"

"Of course I do, and I promise I'll tell you if you can help me; but you must let me do what—what seems best."

"Just what do you mean by that? What do you *know*?"

"I can't tell you."

"But this is absurd!"

"It may sound absurd, but I can't help that."

"Do you realise that if Furlong hadn't been decent enough to take a chance, he could have had Vance arrested?"

"Then he's not going to?"

"Not at present, anyway. He gave Vance a straight talk about it all."

"But he *does* suspect him?"

"Yes and no. You see, it's all pretty difficult——"

"Oh, I know, I know! It's simply terrible!"

"Poor Pettigrew——"

"It's Terry I'm thinking of, not Mr. Pettigrew. He probably deserved all he got!" she broke in, and Doyle started at her tone.

"Why do you say that?" he asked sharply.

Angela hesitated, obviously regretting her words.

"I didn't exactly mean that, of course," she stammered, but Doyle was not satisfied.

"You did!" he declared. "There's something behind this I don't understand. Look here, had Pettigrew been

annoying *you*? But no; he'd have been afraid of Sir Peter."

Angela flushed.

"I can take care of myself without Sir Peter's help, or yours either," she declared.

"Of course. I didn't mean——"

"I know well enough what you meant. And I knew what Mr. Pettigrew meant, too—and *he* knew I knew it. He was clever enough to know when to——"

She stopped, and Doyle realised that he must tread warily.

"I'd no idea he was that sort of man," he hinted, but the girl did not take the bait.

"You say you want to help me," she went on, and he nodded; "very well, then—just forget what I've been saying. Whatever I thought of him has nothing to do with his murder, you can be sure of that. Now I must go; I've ever so many things to do before Sir Peter comes back," and she began to walk away, Doyle keeping step with her.

"Well," he said, after a few minutes' silence, "if you don't want to confide in me, Angel, I must leave it at that, though I think it would be much better if you did. After all, I only want to help."

"You're a dear!" she said impulsively. "But don't ask me any more just now. It—it really doesn't matter——"

She broke off as a voice hailed them. It was Miller, the Night News Editor.

"Hullo!" he said.

"Hullo!" Doyle responded. "You're early, aren't you?"

"Had a lunch engagement at the Press Club," the other explained. "But I say," he went on, "this is a nasty business about Terry Vance, isn't it?"

"Terry?" cried Angela. "What about him?"

"Haven't you heard? I met Sales just now, and he told me."

Sales was the News Editor.

"What on earth are you talking about?" Doyle demanded, with an apprehensive glance at Angela.

"Why, Vance has been arrested," Miller explained. "*Arrested?*"

"Yes."

"What's the charge, do you know?"

"I'm not quite sure whether it's actual murder, or complicity——"

The girl gave a little cry, and Doyle caught her arm.

"Come on," he said brusquely, and they left Miller standing there, staring after them in surprise.

CHAPTER VII

"WHERE are we going?" Angela asked, as she hurried to keep up with Doyle's rapid strides.

"To see Furlong," he answered briefly.

"You think he——?"

"I don't know what to think. Looks as if he's double-crossed me—he certainly pretended to believe in Vance. Anyhow, it's no good discussing it until we know exactly what's happened."

It was only a few minutes' walk to the *Courier* office, and there Doyle led the way to Handley's room.

Richard Furlong had just come in.

"Hullo, Doyle," he said; "just the man I wanted." Then, as he saw Angela: "Oh, come in, Miss Farren."

"Look here, Furlong," Doyle cut in, "what's this about Vance?"

"About Vance? What do you mean?"

"You knew he'd been arrested, didn't you?"

"Arrested?" Richard's surprise was too obvious not to convince them both. "How do you know?"

"Just met Miller; he told us."

Richard took a cigarette from his case and tapped it thoughtfully.

"This is news to me," he said; "I don't know what to make of it."

"What's the good of pretending?" cried Angela bitterly. "You told the police about the cigarette, of course. Well, I *did* find it, and I *did* get those Knight-riders so that I could have one ready to give you. The moment you spoke of the paint mark on my dress I saw that you knew . . . but that doesn't make Terry guilty."

"I quite agree with you," Richard answered gently. "I've had all that out with Vance, as Doyle can tell you. It's a pity Vance was foolish about it, but as a matter of fact I have *not* told the police."

"Then why have they arrested him?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you, but I propose to find out. I'll go along to the Yard at once and try to see him, if they'll let me, and if he's still there. Will you come with me, Doyle?"

"Surely." The reporter turned to Angela. "Don't let this worry you," he begged. "Lots of people get arrested for things they haven't done. Vance will be out again directly. I'll tell you what you can do: cut along to your room, and when Sir Peter comes in tell him about Vance—and for goodness' sake don't let him go storming down to the Yard and kicking up hell! Tell him Mr. Furlong and I have gone there already, and we'll come back and tell him all about it presently."

Angela nodded and left the room without a word.

"Plucky child," Richard commented, reaching for his hat; but Doyle only grunted.

"Then it wasn't you who had Vance arrested?" he demanded bluntly.

"Of course not!" Richard assured him. "Come on; we can talk about it as we go."

As a matter of fact, however, they were rather silent as the car sped along the Embankment and turned in at the gates of New Scotland Yard.

Hubert Dale, as it happened, was out, but Sergeant Reed was in, and in a few minutes they were talking to him. Richard wasted no words.

"Is it true you've got Vance, the *Courier* reporter?" he asked.

"Quite true," Reed assented. "We arrested him ten minutes after he'd finished his talk with you and Mr. Doyle. And by the way, Mr. Furlong," he added, smiling, "may I trouble you for that cigarette-end, if you have it about you? In the name of the law, you know," and he chuckled as Richard took an envelope from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"So you knew about it all the time?" asked Furlong.

"Oh no," the detective responded cheerily. "I have to thank *you* for that. It's not the first time you've helped us, by a long chalk."

Richard restrained a desire to curse.

"I suppose you think I ought to have told you at once?" he said.

"If you were an ordinary citizen," Reed responded with ironic politeness, "I should say you ought to have. But of course we know that in your case——"

"Cut out the jests, Reed, for goodness' sake," Richard interrupted. "You win. How did you know?"

The detective, satisfied with his little triumph, got down to business.

"I *didn't* know," he admitted. "Sir Peter didn't put a private room and the whole of the *Courier* staff at *my* disposal, you know, so I had to do the best I could

without them. To cut a long story short, I made my own inquiries, and it wasn't difficult to find out that young Vance had had a nasty row with Pettigrew. One thing led to another, and I decided to have a chat with Vance. He's an excitable young man, and—like most people—he's inclined to talk too much. He lost his head when I questioned him; in fact, I didn't have to do much questioning, he talked so much himself. I'm afraid he's a bit sore with you, Mr. Furlong."

"With me?"

"Yes. You see, he thinks you double-crossed him—got all you wanted out of him and then told me. He told me himself about the cigarette and all that."

"He didn't mention——?" Doyle began, but stopped abruptly as he caught Richard's eye.

"Eh?" said the detective sharply.

"Oh, nothing——"

"Look here, Reed," Richard interrupted, "I wish you'd let us see Vance for a few minutes, if he's still here. You can be present, of course. I only want him to understand that I didn't let him down."

The sergeant hesitated.

"Well, I don't see any great objection," he decided. "Between ourselves, we're not too sure about him. I put the matter up to Mr. Dale, and he thought there was enough evidence to justify us in holding him until the matter is cleared up one way or the other. Vance is the sort of card who might make a bolt for it, and give us some trouble in finding him again."

"I would have told you about the cigarette at once," Richard explained, "if I had thought it conclusive. But after talking to Vance it seemed to me very unlikely that he killed Pettigrew. He's not the type."

"You get murderers of all sorts and sizes," the detective replied philosophically; "I don't know that I'd say

there was any special *type* myself. Anyhow, if you want to see him——”

Vance had not yet been taken away after his preliminary examination. Reed took Furlong and Doyle to a small room in which Vance was sitting, moodily considering his position, in the charge of a detective who sat writing a report at a desk.

At the sight of Richard, the young man sprang to his feet.

“So it’s you, is it?” he cried furiously. “You damned swine! Thought you were blasted clever, didn’t you, getting me to talk like that——”

“Steady on!” Reed advised him. “There’s no need to get excited.”

“I’m sorry about this, Vance,” said Richard. “I only came to tell you that I hadn’t the slightest idea you’d been arrested.”

“What? Wasn’t it you who told——?”

“I didn’t tell anybody anything about you, as Sergeant Reed will assure you.”

“That’s right,” the sergeant confirmed. “Mr. Furlong said nothing to me about you. I made the arrest on instructions received, after investigating your history. You will remember,” he added dryly, “that I then warned you that anything you said might be used in evidence against you.”

“Sergeant Reed is right,” Richard agreed. “The less you say just now the better. I only wanted you to know that I had no hand in it, and I’m much obliged to him for letting me see you. Tell me, have you seen a lawyer?”

“No, and I’m not going to. Let them do what they damn well like. What do I care? I didn’t kill Pettigrew——”

“Hold on, Vance,” Doyle interrupted, with unexpected gentleness. “You mustn’t talk like that. It’s

only common sense to get a legal bloke to represent you, even though I don't believe for a moment that it will come to a trial."

"You don't?" cried Vance, with a characteristically quick change of attitude. "You believe I'm innocent, don't you?"

"Of course. Look here, let me see to things for you. I know a smart man, and I'll get him to come along. That'll be all right, Reed, won't it?"

"Certainly," Reed agreed. "I'll let you know where Mr. Vance is to be taken, after we've made a few more inquiries, and his lawyer can see him when he likes."

Richard noted the "Mr." and acknowledged the detective's courtesy with a quick glance.

"You'll be all right, Vance," he said. "We'll see about your clothes, and so on, and one of these days you'll be able to write a jolly article about how it feels to be arrested."

Vance was actually smiling by this time, but his face clouded at a sudden thought.

"I'd—I'd like to send a message," he said.

"I think I can deliver it for you," said Richard. "You'd like me to tell a certain lady that you're innocent, and that she's not to worry. Isn't that it?"

"Yes," Vance answered, flushing.

"That's all right; we needn't say any more about it. Now, I mustn't discuss your affairs, but I'll keep in touch with your solicitor and do anything I can for you."

Doyle spoke in similar terms, and they left the young man comparatively cheerful.

"Thanks, Reed," Richard went on, outside the door. "Very good of you."

"Always glad to oblige, when I can."

"I know. Give my regards to Mr. Dale. We'll be off now."

They had come in a *Courier* car, but Doyle stopped as they emerged into the courtyard.

"I'd like to have a word with you before we go back," he said. "Sir Peter will be waiting for us, and I've a suggestion I want to make before we see him."

"Splendid. Where shall we go?"

"There's a tea-shop close by."

"Right."

Doyle turned to the chauffeur.

"Go back to the office," he said. "Ask Miss Farren to tell Sir Peter that Mr. Furlong and I will be there in about half an hour."

"Right, sir," the man responded, and the car slid away.

Doyle took Richard to a tea-shop in Whitehall, found a quiet corner and ordered two cups of coffee.

"I've been thinking about things," he said, when the waitress had left them alone.

"Good. Let's hear your idea."

"It's only an idea, mind, but it seemed worth mentioning. We can leave Vance out of it for the moment. I'm convinced he's innocent, though I admit he's in an awkward jamb at the moment. But we're getting away from what seems to me to be the real mystery of the whole business: that sealed letter that was in Pettigrew's safe. You don't believe, I suppose, that Vance wrote it?"

"It hardly seems likely," Richard admitted cautiously.

"Then there was no reason why he should know anything about it, and no reason why he should take it from Pettigrew's hand."

"Fair enough."

"It might be argued that whoever killed Pettigrew took the letter to suggest a motive of robbery, but that argument doesn't impress me. But we've been assuming all this time one very important thing, without any absolute certainty of its truth."

"What's that?"

"We've assumed that Pettigrew himself had no idea what was in the letter."

Richard did not hide his surprise.

"Do you imagine he *did* know what was in it?" he asked.

Doyle frowned.

"I can hardly answer Yes or No," he replied. "I suppose the idea sounds mad to you——"

"It doesn't sound mad at all; it sounds exceedingly interesting. Do go on."

"Well," Doyle resumed, much encouraged, "it's my experience that you've got to look not only at every side of a question like this; you've got to look at the top and bottom as well, and use a magnifying glass to do it. Let's take the facts first and the theories afterwards. We *know* that a sealed letter came, and was put in Pettigrew's safe, because Sir Peter saw it. We know that someone came to the office and impersonated Sir Peter, and we know that Pettigrew saw him, and we also know that the letter is not in the safe now. So much for the facts.

"Now for the theories. We've assumed that Pettigrew took the letter to the Old Man's room, saw that the person there was *not* Sir Peter, and was about to give the alarm when the man killed him. But isn't there another possibility. It's not a nice one, but we've got to face it:

"Suppose the sending of the letter was a put-up job, and Pettigrew was in it?"

"Suppose, too, that the man who came to the office was known to Pettigrew."

"But why should he be?" asked Richard, keenly interested.

"I can't tell you that, any more than you can tell me what was in the letter," Doyle admitted. "I mean, we

are forced to work in the dark on that point. I'm only trying to show you that it's no good pinning ourselves down to one theory."

"I'm with you all the time. Then if Pettigrew knew the man, what do you think happened?"

"Let me make another point before I answer that. You've held all along that the impersonation of Sir Peter was done by someone familiar with the place—in other words, by a member of the staff. That sounds reasonable, but is it conclusive? Look at it from another angle, and say that it was done *with the help of* someone who was familiar with the office."

"Pettigrew, in fact?"

"Exactly. You see how easy it would be. Pettigrew would know just when Sir Peter was in or out; he could even warn anybody outside by telephone. When the coast was clear, the man would arrive and Pettigrew would hand him the letter. Later on, of course, when the real Sir Peter asked him for the letter, he would reply with great astonishment that he had already given it to him. Then the hall-porter would be questioned, and so forth, and Pettigrew would never be suspected."

Richard took out his inevitable pipe and filled it.

"That's extraordinarily interesting," he said. "There's just one thing I don't follow. Why should the man kill Pettigrew?"

"There you have me," Doyle admitted. "But since we are only theorising, let's put it like this: Some unknown person, Mr. A, wants to give certain information to Sir Peter. Another unknown person, Mr. B, is equally anxious that Sir Peter should not receive it. Mr. B gets hold of Pettigrew and offers him a heavy bribe to hand over the envelope. Pettigrew agrees, for one of two reasons; either he is hard up and needs the money, or he means to bluff Mr. B into walking into a trap. If the latter solution is correct, Mr. B killed Pettigrew to

secure his own escape. If the first one is right, then I suggest that he and Pettigrew quarrelled over the money to be paid. The man may have double-crossed Pettigrew, or Pettigrew may have increased his terms—one can only guess at that.”

“And which solution do you favour?”

“I think Pettigrew needed the money, and I’ll tell you why. In the first place, you heard Vance say he had met him in a gambling hell. If that was his private hobby, it was a pretty expensive one. In the second place, I’ve stumbled on a hint that Pettigrew was something of a woman-hunter. Put those two things together, and you get an idea why Pettigrew may have been ready to take a pretty big chance to fill his pockets.”

Richard cogitated.

“You’ve put an entirely new complexion on the case,” he said, “and I take my hat off to you.”

“It was just an idea,” said the reporter modestly.

“And a damned clever one! What do you suggest we should do next?”

“Delve a bit into Pettigrew’s private life.”

“I agree.”

“And I think I can help you there,” Doyle went on, “if you’ll give me a little time. It’s my job to know shady places.”

Richard rose.

“We’d better get along to the office before Sir Peter screams the house down,” he said, “but I want you to understand that if you solve this problem, as you look like doing, I’ll take jolly good care *you* get the credit for it.”

“Thanks,” Doyle answered, in his heavy way. “It’s just an idea, you know.”

CHAPTER VIII

SIR PETER THEALE, if not exactly screaming the house down, as Richard had phrased it, was at least in a state of mind that expressed itself in a highly unflattering description of Scotland Yard's methods and people, with special reference to Detective-sergeant Reed.

"Look here, Furlong," he exploded, when Richard entered his room, "something's got to be done about this. It's utterly ridiculous! If that fool Reed can't find anything better to do than arrest young Vance, it's time he was thrown out of the Force! I shall make it my business to see the Commissioner——"

"And tell him how to run his own show?" Richard interrupted. "That would be *most* helpful, and do Vance a lot of good into the bargain."

Sir Peter glared at him.

"Perhaps *you* think he's guilty, too?" he demanded.

"That's not the point," Richard responded. "The police have a perfect right to arrest anybody, including you and me, if they like—in a case like this. Just because you don't think Vance did it, that's no reason for putting Reed's back up. Anyhow, do as you like. But if you go and kick up a row at the Yard, you can find someone else to act for you, for I won't!"

Theale reddened.

"Oh, all right, all right," he grumbled. "Perhaps I was a bit hasty. But young Vance——"

"Young Vance may not have killed Pettigrew; in fact, I don't think he did. But it's no good blinking the fact that he quarrelled with Pettigrew, and that he knew he'd been murdered, and said nothing about it. I suppose you know that?"

"Yes. Angela Farren told me about it."

"Very well, then. You're an old newspaper man, and you know very well that if this hadn't happened in your own office, you'd take a much cooler view of things. Now, are you going to leave this to me, or aren't you?"

"By all means, my dear fellow. What do you propose to do?"

"Doyle and I have seen Vance, and Doyle has gone to get hold of a lawyer——"

"Quite right. Tell him to spare no expense—I'll look after that."

"I know; we both understand that. But I warn you that Vance is in deep water, and you needn't expect the police to release him until they are sure he's innocent."

"I wish I could do something——"

"Naturally, and perhaps I'll be asking you presently to do something that will help quite a lot. Meanwhile, I'm asking you to do the hardest thing—just lie low and don't interfere. That's putting it plainly, but I'm not trying to be rude. Now, it's nearly time for your afternoon conference, isn't it? I'm going to clear out to Handley's room. When your people come in for conference, please make light of Vance's arrest. Just say it's a mistake and you feel sure it will be cleared up quite soon."

"All right."

"There's just one other point. You remember that mysterious person who rang you up before sending you the sealed letter?"

"Yes; what about him?"

"Did he speak like an educated man?"

"It's rather difficult to say. As far as I can remember, he spoke rather indistinctly."

"As to speaking indistinctly, that's easy enough. If you talk with a lozenge or a piece of sugar in your

mouth, it's surprising how it disguises your voice. It's a very old trick, of course. But had he any mannerisms? Did he drop his H's, for example?"

"Not in the ordinary way, though he slurred his words a bit. But he did drop one H, oddly enough: he seemed to think I spell my name 'Teale,' not 'Theale.'"

"Did he, indeed? That's interesting."

"Why?"

"One would expect him to know very well how you spell your name. But there may be a reason: suppose he's a Frenchman——"

"Why should he be?"

"Because, as you know, the French don't use the *th* sound in their own language, and even a Frenchman who speaks practically perfect English will sometimes say *t* for *th* if he's in a hurry, or excited."

"That's true; and I fancy I remember that he said *telephon*' instead of *telephone*, though that may have been due to the buzz you sometimes get on the 'phone."

"Well, it's only a matter of getting hold of any clues we can, though it doesn't seem to help much so far. I'll get along now, and see you later."

Back in Handley's room, he sat down and reflected. Then he took up the house telephone and asked to be put through to Angela Farren's room.

"Oh, Miss Farren," he said, when he heard the girl's voice, "this is Richard Furlong. I wonder if you could come and see me for a few minutes? We shall be less likely to be disturbed in Mr. Handley's room than in yours."

When the Angel appeared, he saw at once that their interview was not going to be an entirely friendly one.

She refused the cigarette he offered her, sat down, and waited.

"I suppose you think I'm responsible for Terry Vance's arrest?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes," she answered, with equal directness.

"Well, I'm not. I did not even know that the police suspected him."

"Perhaps, but——"

"Vance gave himself away," he interrupted. "That's the plain truth of it. Doyle and I have just seen him at the Yard, and we're getting a lawyer to defend him. I told you before that I knew nothing about it."

Angela shrugged her shoulders.

"Miss Farren," he went on, "why won't you be frank with me?"

"What do you mean? What is there for me to be frank about?"

"I want your help."

"You flatter me! I'm just a shorthand-typist, you know, not a celebrated detective."

Richard leaned back in his chair.

"I wish," he said deliberately, "that I had known you when you were a baby."

"And why?"

"Because then I could take the liberty of giving you a jolly good shaking!"

The Angel's lips curved in a fleeting smile, but the next moment she frowned.

"Sir Peter does not allow even eminent private detectives to be impertinent to his staff," she said.

"You know perfectly well I'm not trying to be impertinent," he retorted; "and please cut out that eminent detective stuff. What do you know about Pettigrew?"

She started.

"So Mr. Doyle's been telling you——" she began, then stopped abruptly.

"Mr. Doyle hasn't told me anything about you, so

far as Pettigrew is concerned," he answered, keenly alert.

"Then why do you ask?"

"Because there's nobody in this office who knows more about the editorial staff than you do."

"Mr. Pettigrew," she said primly, "was a brilliant newspaper man, and the most capable Night Editor in Fleet Street."

"William the Conqueror," Richard replied, "was a man of great determination and ambition. He landed in England in 1066—Come, Miss Farren, we're not writing school essays. If you've got any reason for treating me like an enemy, I wish you'd mention it. It's sheer waste of time, fencing like this."

"I agree with you that we're wasting time."

"Very well. You force me to take an attitude I regret. Sir Peter has given me authority to act for him. May I ask you to be good enough to answer my questions?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you. I know that Vance is in love with you——"

"Mr. Furlong!" she broke in angrily. "I'm prepared to discuss Mr. Pettigrew's murder, but not my private affairs."

"I beg your pardon," he replied calmly. "I am only trying to find out whether there may be any connection between Mr. Pettigrew's murder and your private affairs."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'm going to tell you. I know that Vance is in love with you; he told me so himself. He wanted to marry you. Do you know whether Pettigrew was aware of that?"

She hesitated.

"He may have been," she admitted.

"Do you *know* that he was?"

"How should I?"

"He *did* know, then."

"I don't see why you should say that."

"You would deny it, if it were not true."

"Very well, then; he *did* know it," cried Angela, exasperated. "What about it?"

"I wonder," Richard ventured, "whether that might have been one of the reasons why he disliked Vance."

"You've no right to suggest such a thing!"

"Why not? If you force me to drag every admission from you, you can't blame me for suggesting things."

Angela restrained herself with an effort.

"What on earth are you talking about?" she demanded.

"I'll tell you quite frankly. I've an idea that Pettigrew was—well, interested in women. At the risk of being accused of being impertinent again, I suggest that as you happen to be an uncommonly attractive girl yourself, it would not surprise me if he had bestowed his attentions on you——"

He stopped, for Angela had suddenly become white.

"I am sorry," he went on gently. "Please don't think I'm enjoying this conversation any more than you are. Can't you see I'm only trying to——"

He stopped again as the girl rose.

"Mr. Furlong," she said quietly, "you may be quite satisfied that if Terry quarrelled with Mr. Pettigrew, it was not about me. If that is all you want to know——"

"It isn't," Richard interrupted, "but it seems to be all you are willing to tell me. You don't see that the more I can find out, the better it will be for Vance in the long run."

"I see very clearly that it was your meddling that landed Terry in prison," she retorted. "You may be anxious to get him out, or you may not. I *am*, and as I

haven't much faith in *your* way, I prefer to try and do it in my own."

Richard smiled thoughtfully.

"As you like, of course," he answered; "but you can't blame me if I say that I think you're unreasonable. In fact, some people would regard your attitude as——"

"Suspicious?" she broke in, and laughed ironically. "Well, why not tell your friend Sergeant Reed about me? Sir Peter can easily find a temporary secretary while I'm in prison."

Richard flushed.

"Since you've used the word," he said, "it's good enough for me."

Angela turned to the door, then paused and looked back at him.

"A man who served in the war," she said, "told me that when he was in a German prison camp one of the sentries chalked on the wall of the officers' mess hut the words: 'There are three kinds of fools; Fools, Damn Fools and British staff officers.' Do you know the fourth kind?"

"I'll buy it," said Richard wearily; "what's the fourth kind, in your opinion?"

"Amateur detectives!" she retorted, and marched out of the room.

Richard had read enough detective stories to know his cue; he should either have laughed lightly and dismissed the matter with a wave of the hand, or sat down and proceeded to think thoughts that would have made Angela and other people tremble if they could have read them.

In point of fact, he sat down and gave way to a brief burst of profanity that would have done credit to a master-printer.

It was not merely that the Golden Angel had worsted him in a most unangelic manner in their battle of

tongues; what annoyed him most was the conviction that his handling of the situation had been clumsy.

He was beginning to have an uneasy feeling that Angela Farren knew a great deal more about the murder of Mr. Pettigrew than he or (he hoped) anyone else had suspected.

It was all very well for her to say that her object was to secure the release of Terry Vance. That was probably true enough; but the average girl secretary does not undertake to elucidate a baffling murder mystery, he told himself, with the calm confidence the Angel had displayed.

He remembered the promptitude with which she had seen and disposed of Vance's cigarette-end. But for the accidental smear of paint on her dress, that clue would probably never have come to light.

A girl who could observe so keenly and act so swiftly was a person to be reckoned with.

Why had she turned so pale when he suggested that Pettigrew might have paid her attentions? It had been a shot in the dark, based on Doyle's hint about Pettigrew's predilection for feminine society. Evidently the shot had told; yet she had assured him that whatever Vance and Pettigrew had quarrelled about, it had not been about herself. It was, of course, possible that she had not been telling the truth, but somehow he was inclined to believe her. It was quite possible that Pettigrew had pestered her without Vance's knowledge; indeed, knowing Terry's hot temper, it was highly probable that the Angel would have preferred to keep him in ignorance of what might have provoked a scene that would have ended in an appeal to Sir Peter, with possibly serious consequences.

Richard bit the stem of his pipe in moody perplexity. Doyle had been right, he decided, in saying that they must find out all they could about the dead man. Petti-

grew the brilliant newspaper man was a known and respected figure; it was Pettigrew the gambler and woman-hunter that they must drag out of the shadows that obscured his past.

Richard went downstairs, got the hall porter to send for a taxicab, and drove to Scotland Yard for the second time that day.

CHAPTER IX

MR. ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HUBERT DALE received Richard with a cheerful grin.

He was studying a document that lay on his desk, and Sergeant Reed was standing beside him.

"Hullo; back again?" he said.

"Yes; sorry to bother you. Can you spare a moment?" Richard answered.

"I'll be free in a second. Take a pew."

Richard sat down, and Dale went on reading the report before him.

Presently the Assistant Commissioner leaned back in his chair and flipped a photograph across to Richard.

It was not a pretty picture. It was a flashlight photograph of a man, lying on his face on the floor of a small room, with a knife sticking in his back.

"Another murder?" asked Richard, and Dale nodded.

"Yes," he answered. "The picture's just taken."

"Anything sensational?"

"I don't think so. Man named Victor Ledoux; assistant manager of a night club. Naturalised Frenchman. Probably a quarrel over some woman. But what was it you wanted to see me about?"

"This Pettigrew business. I'd like to have a look at his room."

"Why not? As a matter of fact, Reed is going there presently, and he'll take you along. Pettigrew's brother has come to town and is looking over his effects."

"Thanks awfully—if I'm not putting you out?"

"Not a bit, Mr. Furlong," Reed assured him. "I've got to look in at this man Ledoux's place first. It's not far from where Pettigrew lived. Perhaps you'd like to come with me, and we can go on to Pettigrew's afterwards."

"Thanks. Suits me splendidly."

"Any new ideas about Pettigrew?" asked Dale.

"Yes and no," Richard answered. "I want to find out what I can about him, that's all."

"The same idea occurred to us," Dale responded dryly, and Richard laughed.

A police car was waiting, and he and Reed got into it.

"Another of our men is really handling the Ledoux case," the detective explained, "but Mr. Dale asked me to keep an eye on it."

"You knew Ledoux?"

"Not personally, but we knew a good deal about him at the Yard. Naturalised Frenchman. Started as a chef, I believe, and had been a waiter, and *maitre d'hotel* and so on. Smart fellow, with a good bit of education. Got a job as assistant manager of the Mandarin club. That sort of fellow often gets mixed up in rows. We'll probably find that he and some other chap had a row about a girl, as Mr. Dale said."

"The Mandarin," Richard repeated. "Don't think I know the place."

"There are so many," Reed remarked. "They spring up like mushrooms, have their day, and then shut up when people get tired of them. The Mandarin is rather popular at the moment, and I'm bound to say it's run

respectably enough—no drinks after hours, or games like that, you know.”

“Where is it?”

“In Red Lion Square.”

“Bloomsbury? Rather out of the way for a night club, isn’t it?”

“Oh, Bloomsbury is getting fashionable again. Quite a lot of smart people live round there now. It’s quiet, and many of the old houses have been modernised and made into bigish flats.”

Ledoux’s rooms were in Doughty Street, near Gray’s Inn Road—a bedroom and a sitting-room on the top floor of a shabby house.

The proprietress opened the door to them, and would have become garrulous if Reed had not cut her short.

A plain clothes man was in charge upstairs.

“This is where he was found,” Reed explained, pointing to a spot just inside the door of the sitting-room. “It seems pretty obvious. You saw from the photograph that he was knifed from behind. I think he came in with the man—or woman—who murdered him, not suspecting his danger, of course. There’s a Yale lock on the sitting-room door. Probably he went first, opened the door and switched on the light, and as he did so the other man stabbed him, and then walked quietly downstairs and let himself out. The landlady found Ledoux’s body about midday. He used to come in very late at night—or rather, early in the morning—and she did not disturb him until he rang. Then she brought him some tea and toast. The rest of his meals he had either at the club or elsewhere. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll just have a look through his things.”

The body had been taken away, and Richard, waiting for Reed, idly visualised the murder. It was a drab setting for a drab affair—the shabby room with its worn furniture and dirty window panes.

"No fingerprints?" he asked.

"None," replied Reed, who was going through the papers in a small bureau. "As I've often said, thanks to the films and cheap novels, every tradesman's boy knows enough to wear gloves when he commits a crime nowadays."

With a rapidity born of long practice the detective examined first the sitting-room, and then the bedroom which opened off it by a connecting door. The bedroom had another door opening on to the landing, but this was kept locked, so that to all intents and purposes the two rooms formed a self-contained flat, to which entrance was obtained only by the sitting-room door.

"Nothing more to be seen here," said Reed at last, glancing at his watch. "We'd better be going. Mr. Lawrence Pettigrew—that's the brother—will think we've got lost."

He gave some instructions to the Scotland Yard man; then he and Richard went on to Guilford Street, which was close by.

The late Night Editor of the *Courier* had occupied half a house, with its own private entrance, and had been looked after by a respectable man and his wife, as valet and housekeeper respectively.

Green, the valet, opened the door.

"Mr. Lawrence Pettigrew is waiting for you in the dining-room, sir," he said.

The dead man's brother proved to be a stout, rosy man of about fifty-five.

"Sorry to keep you," said the sergeant. "I was detained at the Yard. This is Mr. Furlong, who is acting for Sir Peter Theale. Mr. Furlong, this is Mr. Lawrence Pettigrew."

Richard grasped the plump hand extended to him, and said a few words of conventional sympathy.

"Thank you, Mr. Furlong," the other responded;

"kind of you to say so. Yes, it's a terrible business. It makes me wish I'd been on better terms with Tom—that was my brother's name."

"You had—er—quarrelled?" Richard suggested.

"Oh, dear, no! Nothing like that. But Tom and I hadn't much in common. I'm a quiet sort of man, country born and country bred. So was Tom, for that matter, but he had ambitions. I went into our father's business down at Devizes, and took it over when he died. Auctioneer and surveyor, and as sound a little business as any in the West of England, though I say it! But that was no use to Tom. He came to London, and they tell me he was quite a great man in the newspaper world. Well, well; and now he's dead—murdered! But you mustn't think we were bad friends—only we didn't agree about a good many things, politics and so on. It wasn't often I came to London, and he didn't come down our way much; but he was always welcome if he did come, and my wife did all she could to make him feel at home."

"You hadn't seen him lately?" asked Reed.

"Not for nearly a year, except for a day at Christmas. He was on a motoring tour with friends, and he looked in to see us. When I read in the paper about him being murdered, and got Green's telegram, you can understand what a shock it was."

"Naturally, and we want to spare you as much as possible," Reed assured him. "You've gone through his papers?"

"Yes. There weren't many to go through. He'd left a letter addressed to me, telling me that if anything happened to him I was to take it to his bank, and the manager would give me his will, and so on."

"Really?" said Reed. "That almost looks as though——"

"As though he was afraid of being killed? Oh, no.

I can explain that. Tom was a very methodical man; kept everything in its place, you know. The letter I'm speaking of—I've got it here to show you—was written nearly five years ago. It came about through a conversation we had when he was staying with me for a couple of days. I happened to tell him about a friend of ours who'd been killed in a motor smash, and had left all his affairs in confusion. Tom said that would never happen with him, as he only kept papers of importance, and he added that if anything ever happened to him I'd find everything straight, and his bank manager would be able to tell me about everything. I laughed, I remember, and said the odds were I'd go first, and then I thought no more about it. I never dreamed of such a terrible thing as this."

"I'm afraid I must ask you to let me look at his papers," said Reed, after a pause to let the other recover himself. "It's only a formality, of course, but you'll understand that we must leave no stone unturned to find the man who killed your brother."

"To be sure, to be sure! Only too glad to help you in any way I can. All his papers are here. He kept them in a deed-box at his bank, and when your man took me there the manager gave them to me at once."

The deed-box, however, proved disappointing. There was a brief will, leaving everything to Lawrence Pettigrew, with the exception of a legacy to Green, the valet, and his wife. There were a few share certificates, some memoranda of Stock Exchange transactions, and similar papers.

"I see he left practically everything to you," Reed remarked.

"Yes. We two were the only ones left of the family."

"You'll excuse me if I ask whether you have any idea how much he was worth?"

Mr. Lawrence Pettigrew's ruddy face clouded in perplexity.

"No objection at all to your asking," he replied. "The truth is, I'm a bit surprised. You mustn't think I care about that—about his money, you understand. I've enough of my own, and it's not the money that bothers me——"

"Quite so," Reed murmured.

"But I frankly admit I'm puzzled," the auctioneer went on. "Tom had a biggish salary. I never asked him exactly how much he got. It was none of my business. But he told me more than once that Sir Peter Theale had treated him handsomely. Besides that, Tom was no fool, and in the position he held he often got to hear of good things to invest in. Then—well, he wasn't married, and he wasn't an extravagant man, by what I can see. And yet, to come to the point, he's hardly left anything at all. Putting it down roughly, when all's settled up I don't suppose there'll be more than a few hundred pounds left."

"You surprise me."

"I'm surprised myself, as I told you."

"Perhaps he was speculating," Richard suggested.

Lawrence Pettigrew shook his head.

"You never know what a man will do," he admitted, "but I doubt it. Tom was a shrewd man about money."

There was an awkward silence.

"I know what you gentlemen are thinking," said Lawrence, with unexpected penetration. "The money had to go somewhere. You're thinking he may have been keeping some woman. Well, it's possible, of course."

"Have you asked his servant about him?" Reed queried.

"No. I thought you'd do that better than I could—and it's not a job I care about much."

Reed rang the bell, and the valet appeared.

"You and Mrs. Green looked after the late Mr. Pettigrew?" the detective asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Been long in his service?"

"Nine years next December, sir."

"I see. Now, Green, you must understand that this is a very serious matter, and if I question you about Mr. Pettigrew, I've got good reasons for it."

"I quite understand, sir. Me and Mrs. Green would be only too pleased to help."

"You liked Mr. Pettigrew."

"Yes, sir. He was a good master, and we did our best to serve him well. You'll excuse me, sir, but we wouldn't have been here all these years if he hadn't been satisfied with us."

"I'm quite sure of that, and the best proof is that he left you both a legacy."

"Did he, indeed, sir? Well, that was very handsome of him. But I wish he was alive to pay our wages instead."

"You didn't know he'd put your names in his will, then?"

"How should we, sir? Mr. Pettigrew didn't talk about his affairs to us."

"All right. Now, tell me, did he entertain much?"

"Not here, sir. He'd have a few friends in now and then, but of course he was mostly at the office at night; and when he wasn't, he generally had any parties he wanted to give at a restaurant."

"How do you know that?"

"I've often rung up to book a table for him, sir."

"I see. You say he sometimes had friends to see him here?"

"Yes, sir. Now and again they'd come to lunch, or call in for a drink late at night."

"Any special friends?"

"No, sir—if you mean, were they always the same ones? They were generally gentlemen from Fleet Street, I think, from the bits of talk I heard when I'd wait at table or bring in drinks."

"Any ladies come here?"

"No, sir."

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite sure—for a reason."

"What reason."

"Well, you'll excuse me, sir, but me and Mrs. Green used to say what a pity it was Mr. Pettigrew didn't marry and settle down, like."

"Did you ever hint at such a thing to him?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Mr. Pettigrew was always very pleasant with us, and I could say a good deal to him without giving offence."

"Do you remember any special occasion when you made such a remark to him?"

"Yes, sir. It was about a year ago, if I remember rightly. Mr. Lawrence had been up in town——"

"That's right," the auctioneer put in. "I came up for a day on business, and lunched with my brother here."

"Yes, sir," Green went on; "if you remember, sir, your brother asked you to stay the night, but you said your wife was expecting you back. After you'd gone, I remarked to Mr. Pettigrew what a pity it was he hadn't got a wife to welcome him back when he came in tired from the office. He only laughed and said he was afraid he wasn't the marrying sort. 'Besides, Green,' he says, 'how could I go and pick *one* girl, when they're all so beautiful?' he says. Of course, that was his joke, so I laughed, and he goes on: 'Now, if I'd met Mrs. Green before you did, things might have been different.' Just then Mrs. Green came in and I repeated what he'd said,

and we all had a good laugh. I'm telling you this, sir, to show you what a pleasant-spoken gentleman he was."

"Yes, that was just like Tom," said Lawrence; "always at one extreme or the other."

"He could be a bit hot-tempered at times," the valet agreed, "but it was all over and done with in a few minutes. No 'olding things against you, if you know what I mean, sir."

"Thank you, Green," said Reed. "I think that's all at present."

"Very good, sir." He turned to Lawrence Pettigrew. "What would you wish me to do about things here, sir?"

"I'll stay here a day or two," the auctioneer decided, "and I'd like you to go on looking after the place. Then we'll see. I think I can find you employment, if you need it. But we can discuss that later on."

"Very good, sir; much obliged to you, sir. I'm sure we'll try to give satisfaction in the future, as we have in the past."

He included them all in a respectful bow, and went out.

"Well," said Richard thoughtfully, "whatever your brother did with his money, he didn't spend it here. The question is: what *did* he do with it?"

"The question I'm more interested in," said Reed bluntly, "is, who killed him?"

"Perhaps the answer to the first question may be the answer to the other," Richard responded, and the detective shot a quick glance at him.

"I must be going now," Richard went on. "Thank you very much for letting me come, Reed. I'll hope to have the pleasure of meeting you again, Mr. Pettigrew."

He left the house, found a taxicab, and drove to Jermyn Street.

"Mr. Doyle's been on the 'phone, sir," said the terse Pratt, as he entered.

"How long ago?"

"Half an hour, sir."

"Any message?"

"He'll ring again presently——"

He broke off as the bell tinkled, and answered the telephone.

"It's Mr. Doyle, sir," he said.

"Hullo, Doyle," said Richard, taking the instrument.

"I particularly want to see you," came the reporter's voice.

"Right. When and where?"

"To-night. Will you have dinner with me somewhere?"

"Very nice of you; but if you want a quiet talk, why not eat with me at my club?"

"Thanks; as you like. But please put on war-paint—tails and a white tie."

"O-ho! Are we going a-Maying, so to speak?"

"Perhaps. Look here, I can't explain now. Shall we say eight o'clock? . . . Right. Cheer-ho, then, and forgive me for being so mysterious."

Richard put down the telephone and commanded Pratt to bring him a cocktail.

"It's a funny world," he remarked.

Pratt, who had been his batman in the war, contorted his grim visage into what was understood to be a smile.

"Damn funny, sir!" he agreed, and departed to lay out the tails and the white tie.

CHAPTER X

THE hands of the big clock in the hall marked exactly eight when Martin Doyle, impeccably attired in evening kit, presented himself at the Greville Club.

Richard greeted him cheerily.

"I have one rule in life which I have found very satisfactory," he said, "and that is: if you can possibly help it, never talk shop while you're eating."

"A good rule," Doyle responded, and they began with gin and French.

The meal was a pleasant one. Doyle, in his dry way, was an amusing talker, and possessed the essential qualification of a satisfactory guest of appreciating good food and sound wine. When they had finished, they found a quiet alcove in the smoking-room, and settled themselves in arm-chairs on either side of a little table on which were speedily set coffee and liqueurs.

"And now," said Richard, much cheered by his dinner; "and now, Mephistopheles, do your stuff. Reveal your horrid secret, and let us sally forth to—to wherever we're supposed to go."

Doyle smiled faintly.

"To tell you the truth," he replied, "I'm not sure how you'll take what I'm going to say."

"My dear fellow, you needn't be afraid of offending me," Richard assured him quickly. "What's the trouble?"

"I'll tell you. You know I went off to see if I could get on the track of Pettigrew and his gambling associates?"

"Quite."

"Well, I fancy I've been successful—up to a point, anyhow."

"Good man!"

"I'm not dead certain, mind, but I think I'm right. I thought I'd let you in on it before going any farther."

"Very sporting of you——"

"Half a minute. That's where we meet the snag. I'm in rather a queer position, Furlong. As a crime reporter, I'm on good terms with the police, of course. That's part of my job. But on the other hand, it pays me to have a nodding acquaintance with various people who are not too fond of the law—in plain words, crooks. You can understand how valuable that is in my work."

"I certainly can; but isn't it a bit risky?"

"It is," Doyle admitted; "I have to watch my step. But I've established myself as a sort of human No Man's Land. Both sides know that whatever they tell me goes no farther; the police know I wouldn't let them down, and the crooks know I wouldn't give them away. It's a bit difficult to explain to an outsider, but that sort of thing is possible for a newspaper man, although it probably wouldn't be so for anyone else."

"I quite understand. If I may say so, it shows what a reputation you must have for being dead straight."

"Nice of you; but I mustn't claim too much credit for that. If some of my acquaintances thought I double-crossed them, I shouldn't have much more chance of being straight—I'd pretty soon be dead!"

"Cheery fellows!"

"Oh, fair do's, they're only following their code."

"So that's how you got your tip about Pettigrew?"

"Yes, but the man I spoke to didn't know very much; he could only give me a hint that seems worth following up."

"That's something, anyhow. When do we start?"

"Well," the reporter answered in some embarrassment, "that's what I've got to talk to you about. You see, your work as an inquiry agent acting for Sir Peter

puts you almost on the footing of the police, so I've got to put a proposition to you that you may not like."

"Go ahead."

"I'd like to take you to a certain place that appears to be harmless enough, but we might see things there that are not so harmless, and I should have to ask you to promise not to give them away. You see, in my own case, I'm quite prepared to go farther than usual, without feeling that I'm breaking faith, because Pettigrew was one of my own cloth, so to speak; but you are in a different street. Still, there it is: if you don't like the idea, don't hesitate to say so."

Richard thought for a moment.

"I see your difficulty," he answered. "What you suggest is quite fair, but I've got to consider everything it implies. I'm not asking you for details, but suppose we put it this way: I'm not a policeman, and I can use my discretion so long as I don't evade my responsibility as a citizen. At the same time, the police are very decent to me, and I owe them a good deal. But in this case I am out to find Pettigrew's murderer, and I take it that any discovery in that line would be usable?"

"Certainly—that's what we are both after—and I'm taking a pretty big risk myself of losing what I may call my criminal connection, to find out."

"I realise that. Well, I put myself in your hands, and I promise that, apart from the murder, I won't give away anything you don't want me to. Is that all right?"

"Quite, thanks. But there's still one point it's only right I should mention. There's just a possibility of risk—to you, I mean."

"In what way?"

"If somebody spots you, and thinks you've double-crossed *me*, you may get into a tough jamb. Not that I think there's much risk. If you'll forgive me for saying

so, you're not yet very widely known in the criminal investigation line——"

"Of course I'm not," Richard broke in, laughing. "Don't be afraid of hurting my vanity."

"I know what good work you've done—and I'm not flattering you—but you're an amateur, and the regular criminal classes don't know you yet. It's really rather a good thing, you know. Still, there's always the possibility that you may be recognised, and if you'd rather I handled it myself——"

"My dear Doyle, don't worry about me. It's very good of you to let me in on this, and I think I can take care of myself if it comes to a scrap."

"Then we'll leave it at that. I thought it only fair to warn you, but I hadn't any doubt of your answer. Now let's get down to brass tacks. Do you know a night club called the Mandarin?"

"Yes," Richard answered in surprise. "At least, I heard of it to-day for the first time. One of the club officials has been murdered."

"Oh, you've heard of that, too? They were talking about it in the office. I should have been doing the story if Sir Peter hadn't taken me off all office duty for this job. Where did you hear of it? It isn't in the papers yet—it'll be out to-morrow, but the police kept it out of the evening papers for some reason."

"I was at the Yard," Richard explained. "I wanted to visit Pettigrew's rooms. As it happened, Reed was going there to meet Pettigrew's brother, but he had to call at the murdered man's place on the way, and he took me with him. Man named Ledoux; assistant manager of the club, I believe."

"Yes; I knew him. Nasty little fellow, to be frank. I expect he asked for all he got. However, we needn't waste time on him just now. You've never been to the Mandarin?"

"No."

"We'll go along there presently. It may be interesting. I've a strong suspicion that it was there that Pettigrew threw his money about."

"That reminds me," Richard put in, "he left very little, so his brother says; so you seem to have been right in your theory that he was hard up."

"That's interesting. He ought to have had a pretty fat bank balance."

"About this Mandarin club: Reed seemed to consider it a pretty harmless place—quite well-conducted, and all that."

"He would. That's the cleverness of the people who run it. On the surface, it's all very proper. You couldn't get a drink after hours for love or money."

"Who runs it?"

"An interesting old bloke called Wang—Dr. Wang."

"Real Chinese, or——?"

"Oh, he's genuine enough. I made it my business to find out. He was a real, honest-to-goodness mandarin somewhere in the south of China; down in the Cantonese area, I believe. His people were big noises under the old Manchu dynasty, but everything changed when the Republic was established, as you know. I gather that after a good many upheavals Dr. Wang—he's an honorary Doctor of Philosophy of one of the foreign universities—left China, wandered about a good deal, and then settled in London. His present manager, a fellow named Jeff Carson, got hold of him and persuaded him to start this club. Wang had a bit of money—the remnant of his family fortune, I suppose—and Carson undertook the business end. The show is rather originally got up, with Chinese costumes and so on, and it seems to be doing very well."

"Who is this Carson?"

"Dubious character, I imagine. Obviously well

educated, and looks as though he'd been in the army, as he says he was. I shouldn't be surprised if he'd been cashiered. Anyhow, that's not my affair. He seems to have travelled a bit, and claims to have met Wang abroad, and been of some service to him. The point is, under the guise of running a night club, Carson is conducting a highly lucrative gambling hell, where you can play anything from poker to fan-tan, I'm told; but it's extremely exclusive, and only a select few know about it."

"Does Dr. Wang know?"

Doyle shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you ever been able to discover what a Chinese knows, or does not know?" he demanded. "I never have. They are about as talkative as their own idols. Or rather, they *talk*, but they don't tell you anything. This bland old blighter, Wang, might be the most charming old gentleman that ever quoted Confucius, or he might be a professional murderer, for all you might guess by talking to him. He has the manners of a diplomat and the learning of a professor. Anyway, you can judge for yourself when you see him. But be careful, Furlong. Don't seem inquisitive. You'll come in as my friend—I'm a member of the club, though I've only been there a few times—and then, if we can work it, we'll see the other side—the gambling part. But I'll have to be cautious, and we'll only spoil things if we try to go too fast."

"Quite. But tell me, are you sure it's wise to take me with you, from your own point of view? I mean, I don't want to queer your pitch professionally, and I can probably find someone who knows the Mandarin, and would take me along——"

"Don't worry about me," the reporter interrupted grimly. "It's good of you to think of it, but I'm in this thing for keeps—and damn the consequences, as some

political swell once said. Besides," he added, smiling, "it's up to us to put one over on the Yard by solving the problem before Reed can do it."

"Reed is a smart fellow."

"Don't I know it? I've seen him at work too often. But he's up the wrong street this time, if he really thinks Vance is guilty."

"Even I have been known to make mistakes," said Richard solemnly, and Doyle laughed.

"We shall all probably make a lot more mistakes before we get to the bottom of this business," he predicted. "I'm not exactly a babe in these things, as you know, but I'm hanged if I ever saw a case that needed more thinking about. However, let's get along to the Mandarin, shall we? We may draw a blank, of course, but it's worth trying."

"It certainly is," Richard agreed, and they got their hats and coats and obtained a taxi-cab.

"I wonder if you'd mind my asking you a rather personal question?" said Doyle, as they drove to the night club.

"Of course not," Richard assured him. "What is it?"

"What made you take up this criminological stunt? I mean, it's a bit out of the usual line of country for people of your type. Am I beastly rude?"

"Not a bit. Lots of people have said the same thing to me. I don't quite know what made me begin it. I've always been interested in the crime question. One hears such a lot of tripe talked about it, you know, as though a criminal lived in a special world of his own. I'm rather sorry for the average criminal; he's so often the victim of circumstances. Mind you, I'm not talking of the brute who attacks children—or animals, for that matter; or the swine who goes in for blackmail. Hanging's too good for those people. If I had my way I'd feed them on bread and water and flog them every

month until they pegged out—and a jolly good ride! And I'd do the same to those rotten financiers who ruin thousands of widows and other small investors; go to gaol (chiefly in the prison library, or something easy like that) for a few years; and then come out and live comfortably on the money they've tucked away in some foreign bank."

"Drastic!" Doyle remarked. "But I must say I agree with you. Most newspaper men I've met think like that, but it wouldn't do to say so in print quite so strongly. The humanitarians, as they call themselves, would raise hell!"

"I know the sort! People who think a policeman ought to let himself be kicked to death by a drunken tough, rather than give the lout a crack on the head with his baton. They ought to see how some of the foreign police forces handle a rowdy crowd! I'm not defending what is commonly called the Third Degree method. That sort of thing can be carried too far—though there's a good deal of exaggeration about some of the stories that go round; but it's no good playing at policemen. If you're going to protect society at large, you've got to use the best weapons you can get, just as you do in a war. Our police are pretty good, I think you'll agree——"

"Absolutely."

"—— but they're hampered by this regulation and that until the dice are pretty heavily loaded in favour of the criminal."

"That's so. People talk about the telephone and the telegraph and the wireless, and all the other modern discoveries, helping the police to catch the criminal. They forget that all those things help the criminal to down the police, too. However, we can discuss that some other time. Here we are at the Mandarin."

CHAPTER XI

THE Mandarin club was in Red Lion Square, a quiet oasis off Southampton Row.

Under the skilful direction of Mr. Jeff Carson an old-fashioned house had been converted into an establishment which was picturesque, but never too picturesque to be comfortable.

The exterior was orthodox beyond reproach. The house was painted a quiet green, and over the doorway shone the word

MANDARIN

in green-tinted electric light.

A be-medalled ex-sergeant, in the uniform and cross-belt of the Corps of Commissionaires, opened the door of the taxi-cab and saluted smartly as Doyle and Furlong stepped out.

Once inside the door, however, the scene changed.

An electric globe masked by a Chinese lantern of green silk threw a soft light over a hall, the rich carpet of which was patterned with a great golden dragon.

A couple of obviously genuine Chinese lads in blue tunics and trousers hurried forward, bowed, and took the visitors' hats and coats. A third, his hands folded within the wide sleeves of a green jacket, bowed three times and silently preceded them up a flight of polished stairs, on which his felt-soled shoes made no sound.

"Don't be surprised if I don't mention your name when we meet Carson," Doyle whispered. "When a member introduces a friend, it is understood that he is responsible for him. You might be a Bishop in *mufsi*,

or a Cabinet Minister having a night out. They're discreet people here."

"Evidently," Richard murmured, smiling.

The whole of the first floor had been made into one large apartment, save for a few small service rooms opening off it; and a balcony ran round three sides of it.

The centre of the floor was polished and kept clear for dancing. At the sides and at one end were tables accommodating from two to six people; at the other end was a low dais for the orchestra. There were more tables in the balcony, from which one could look down at the floor below.

Chinese lanterns hung from the ceiling, and the walls were draped with rich materials embroidered with dragons and other devices.

When Richard and Doyle entered, about three-quarters of the tables were occupied by a smart crowd of well-dressed men and women that Richard's practised eye told him were certainly not of the crook class. Here and there, indeed, he recognised a face he knew by sight.

All the attendants were in Chinese costume, and the band wore similar dress.

Doyle gave an order, and a silent-footed waiter brought drinks.

The band began to play, and several couples rose to dance.

"A fox-trot," Richard remarked; "nothing very Oriental about that."

"That's their cleverness," Doyle explained. "They know what the average Briton is: you can put him down in the most exotic surroundings, and even induce him to rig himself out in fancy dress on occasion; but if you want him to be really happy you must not overdo it. People come here because, although they like the quaintness of the place, they know they'll get jolly good

food and drink, and hear music they can dance to. Cut the menu down to noodles and chop-suey, and you'd kill the place stone dead."

He broke off as a tall man in a dinner-jacket approached them. He was a big fellow, well over six feet in height and built in proportion. His dark, clean-shaven face was not without a certain attractiveness; although an old scar, running across his cheek from the base of his right ear, gave his mouth an oddly cynical twitch.

"Good-evening, Doyle," he said pleasantly. "Haven't seen you lately."

"Hello, Jeff," the reporter responded. "How are you? No, I haven't been in for some time. Been busy. By the way, I've brought a friend to see the place." Turning to Richard he added: "This is Mr. Jeff Carson, who really invented the show, and runs it."

Carson smiled at Furlong.

"Doyle is too kind," he said. "I'm afraid I mustn't claim the credit for the artistic side. I look after the prosaic end—the management, you know. The war finished me for a more active job, I'm afraid," and he smiled as he touched the scar on his face.

"I must congratulate you on your success, anyhow," Richard answered politely, as he privately decided that the man was a complete outsider. "It looks an awfully jolly show. Won't you sit down and tell us about it?"

"Thanks," said Carson, drawing up a chair from the next table. "You see," he went on, "it's not easy to hit on anything new nowadays. You know what night clubs are. Either they're as dull as ditchwater, or else you sit in momentary expectation of the police raiding the place and politely asking you to turn up at the police court next morning. We try to hit a happy medium. We give you decentish food, if I may say so, and a bit of cabaret, and try to keep the place a bit select.

Anyhow, you needn't be afraid of getting run in, for the police know all about us. Even this reprobate Doyle couldn't get a drink after hours here!"

"Very sound," Richard replied, laughing.

Just then an attendant handed Carson a note.

He glanced at it and rose.

"Do excuse me," he said. "The chef wants me about something. See you later, I hope?"

"Right," said Doyle. "By the way, is Dr. Wang here?"

"I'm expecting him at any minute. I'll tell him you're here."

"Thanks."

He moved away as the band finished playing and the dancers went back to their seats.

"So that's Carson," Richard remarked.

"Yes; what do you think of him?"

"Shifty. Oddly enough, his face is vaguely familiar, but I can't place him. Seems to stick to his job, though."

"He does. Very capable——"

Doyle broke off as the orchestra crashed out a chord. The lights, already subdued, were turned still lower, and a spot-light glowed on a door at the side.

"Ah, that will be Mah Lee," said the reporter.

"Who's he?"

"It's a her, not a he," Doyle explained ungrammatically. "Clever wench; you watch."

Richard watched.

The band began to play an Oriental melody as the side door opened and a girl came out.

She was small, but perfectly proportioned, with lustrous eyes in an oval face.

She wore a robe of jade-green silk, with gold embroidery at the sleeves and hem, and on her feet were satin slippers with the high Manchu heel. Jade pen-

dants, set in gold, hung from her ears, and her black hair was elaborately dressed in the Manchu *coiffure*.

She was followed by a slim girl in the costume of a Chinese boy, with a false pigtail hanging from a close-fitting black cap. This girl carried a beautiful fan of ivory and feathers, an embroidered bag and a silken cushion.

Mah Lee advanced slowly, the spot-light following her, and bowed three times in response to the applause that greeted her.

Her attendant placed the cushion on the floor and handed her the fan; then took up her position a few paces behind, standing motionless with head bowed and hands folded in her sleeves.

Mah Lee dropped to her knees on the cushion, waved her fan, closed it with a sudden snap, and began to sing in a low, rich voice.

It was a love-song of old China, done into English blank verse, and she sang it exquisitely.

When the applause had subsided, she signed to her attendant, who drew a tiny book from the bag and handed it to her.

"Hullo, she's got some new stunt," whispered Doyle, as the orchestra sounded a sudden discordant note.

Mah Lee began to read from her book:

These are the sayings of the Sages:

Prosperity is a blessing to the good, but to the evil it is a curse.

Every day cannot be a feast of lanterns.

Women's business is simply the preparation and supplying of wine and food.

Beyond the threshold of her apartments she should not be known for evil or for good.

In driving with a woman, one must drive with one hand and keep the other behind his back.

Do not pull up your stockings in a melon-field, or arrange your hat under a peach tree, lest people think you are stealing.

Fan Ch'e asked about knowledge. The Master said: "It is to know men."

The ceremony of marriage lies at the foundation of government.

I have not seen one who loves virtue as he loves beauty.

Chung-king asked about perfect virtue. The Master said: "It is when you go about to behave to everyone as if you were receiving a great guest."

Again the orchestra sounded discordantly. Mah Lee rose and handed the book to her attendant, who snatched up the cushion.

Then Mah Lee began to dance—slowly at first, then more quickly as the music grew wilder.

Abruptly she stopped. The spot-light bathed her in a deep red radiance, and she sang with extraordinary vibrance a verse of the fierce war-chant with which thousands of yelling Orientals had lashed themselves into the blood-fury in the great Boxer rebellion:

We, the Brothers of the Long Sword, will lead the van;

Our sisters of the Red Lantern will bring up the rearguard.

Together we will attack the Barbarians, and drive them into the Sea.

She ceased, the lights went up, and there was a

momentary silence, followed by a tremendous burst of applause.

"Well, that's the most original show I've seen in this country," said Richard, lighting a cigarette.

"Clever girl, Mah Lee," Doyle assented. "Always got some new idea."

"I don't know that it would go down everywhere," Richard remarked.

"She knew she was playing to a cultured audience," Doyle retorted slyly, and Richard laughed.

"Is she Chinese?" he asked.

"No more than you are, but she makes up extraordinarily well. Her real name is Lucile Vernon. I believe she's half-English and half-French. Carson was clever enough to snaffle her, but he'll have to pay through the nose to keep her, once she gets known. I saw her do a turn as a Frenchwoman in China the other day, and you wouldn't have believed she was the same girl. She'll come out and walk round presently, and I'll try to get a chance to introduce you."

"Do. By the way, who was the girl with her?"

"I don't know. Sort of chorus-girl person hired for the occasion, I expect. I say, look over there; that's Dr. Wang."

An old man had entered the room and was making his way slowly round it, stopping now and then to speak to some of the guests.

He was a small, fragile-looking figure, but he carried himself with a certain dignity, which was enhanced by a magnificent robe of lavender-coloured silk, heavily perfumed and embroidered on the breast with the symbolic dragon. He wore a Manchu hat in which were fastened peacock feathers and the sapphire button which indicated his rank as a mandarin of the third grade. His thin yellow fingers emerged now and then from the

wide sleeves of his garment, clasping an ivory box from which he occasionally took a pinch of snuff.

His parchment-like face was placidly inscrutable as he passed from table to table, exchanging greetings in excellent English.

Doyle rose as the old man approached.

"Good-evening, Dr. Wang," he said.

"Ah, good-evening, Mr. Doyle," the other replied. "So you have come again? That is good. I trust that you and your friend have enjoyed our poor entertainment?"

Richard rose and bowed courteously.

"It was most interesting and original, your Excellency," he replied, with a significant glance at the sapphire button.

Dr. Wang inclined his head.

"You are kind enough to give me a title to which I no longer lay claim, although I still wear the trappings, Mr. Furlong," he answered, and smiled faintly at the surprise Richard could not quite conceal. "You see that I know you. I have had the privilege of being presented to your honourable father, Lord Roodacre, at The Chinese Embassy, at a gathering at which you were also present. We were, however, both younger then. That is of yesterday; I have retired from the society of the great ones to the companionship of my books and pictures."

"I believe," Richard responded, "that it was Confucius who said: 'The princely man enters into no situation where he cannot be himself.'"

"Ah!" cried the old man, with sudden animation; "so you, too, have read the works of the Master?"

"A little. I thought I recognised some of the quotations that girl read a few minutes ago."

Dr. Wang took snuff.

"The one who now addresses you," he said, falling

quaintly into his native idiom, although still speaking in English, "was exercised in his mind concerning the propriety of such an exhibition. Yet it seemed to him that the eternal truths could not be dishonoured by being uttered in such a place, and that they might even induce the light-minded to reflect upon the Five Excellent Things."

"It has been said: 'The rules of propriety are simply the principle of reverence,'" said Richard.

Dr. Wang struck his hands gently together.

"This person agrees," he answered. "It is also written: 'There is nothing better than observance of the rules of propriety for giving security to the upper classes and good government to the people.' And again: 'It is virtuous manners which constitute the excellence of a neighbourhood.'"

He took snuff and smiled.

"But come," he went on, "I must not allow myself to become pedantic. It is not often that I meet a student of the Master's works. I hope that one of these days you will give me the privilege of receiving you at my poor house, where I will show you a book or two that may interest you. Meanwhile, will you honour me by allowing me to make you an honorary, and most welcome, member of our little circle here?"

"You are most kind."

"Then that is settled. The good Carson will arrange it. And now, if you will permit me——"

He bowed ceremoniously, smiled, and continued his circuit of the room.

"Well, you certainly got away with that!" said Doyle, when Dr. Wang was out of earshot. "How on earth did you dig up all that Chinese stuff? It hit the old boy where he lived!"

Richard laughed.

"Pure luck," he answered. "I'm a bit of a book

collector, and the other day I came across rather a decent edition of Confucius. It's attractive stuff and I soaked in it, rather, and those bits I quoted happened to stick in my memory. I'd been thinking of them while that girl was doing her stuff."

"It put you on velvet with Wang, anyhow, and it may help a lot. Every waiter in the room knows by this time that Wang took you to his heart, and I've no doubt the whole staff will know it in ten minutes."

"By the way," Richard asked, "are they all real Chinese?"

"Most of them are. There are two or three Englishmen, a French chef, and so on; the rest are genuine Chinks."

"Not a bad choice. There's nothing like an Oriental for keeping his mouth shut."

"Exactly. Now, seeing what a hit you've made, I'm inclined to try a bluff. What do you say to trying to barge into the gambling-room?"

"I'm with you."

"Right. I can get in myself, of course. It's you I've been worrying about, but we may be able to pull it off now. Come on."

He rose, and Richard followed him out of the room with a tingling anticipation of adventure.

CHAPTER XII

DOYLE led the way downstairs to the hall, and into a room off it in which newspapers and periodicals lay on small tables. There was a telephone cabinet in one corner, and a small cocktail bar in another. The room, as it happened, was empty.

"Two Mandarins, Jimmy," said Doyle to the barman, who, like all the other servants, wore Chinese dress, but was unmistakably English. "Jimmy is a great hand at cocktails," he added, turning to Furlong. "His 'mandarin' is a speciality of the place."

Jimmy grinned and got busy.

"Excellent!" Richard declared, tasting the concoction. "Some day I'll beg the recipe from you."

"Glad you like it, sir," the man replied.

"This gentleman is a very special friend of mine," said Doyle significantly. "Dr. Wang has just made him an honorary member."

"So I heard, Mr. Doyle."

"I want to take him down to the private supper-room," Doyle whispered, but Jimmy looked dubious.

"Very sorry, Mr. Doyle," he said. "You know how strict the Boss is, and this gentleman's not on my list."

"You're quite right to be careful, but you needn't worry," Doyle assured him. He bent over the bar and whispered, and Richard saw a crisp bank-note pass from hand to hand.

"Well, if you'll back me up if there's any trouble, Mr. Doyle——" said the barman.

"That'll be all right," nodded the reporter. "Come on," he added to Richard, and opened the door of the telephone cabinet.

There was just room for both of them inside.

Doyle closed the door and signalled through the glass to Jimmy. The barman turned a switch below the counter, and Richard gave a sharp exclamation as the floor of the telephone box sank beneath them.

"It's all right," said Doyle, grinning. "This box is really a lift. The telephone is genuine, and the lift only works when Jimmy turns on the current. Neat, isn't it?" he added, as the lift stopped in a dimly-lighted corridor.

"Very," Richard agreed, as they stepped out. "I thought my inside was falling out when we went down so suddenly!"

Doyle shut the door and pressed a button, and the lift shot upwards.

"How about getting out?" Richard asked. "There might be people in the bar."

"We only enter by the lift," Doyle explained. "There's a separate way out at the back of the basement."

He turned to a little cupboard in the wall, took out a couple of black silk half-masks, and handed one to Richard.

"Put that on," he said, and adjusted the other so that it covered his face from nose to lips.

"What's the idea? Christy Minstrel show?"

"Not quite. The fact is, some of the people who come here don't want to be recognised, even by the other members. It's rather convenient in our case."

"The fellow upstairs wasn't too keen on letting me come down. What did he mean by my not being on the list?"

"He has a list of people who are in the know, so to speak."

"What do you expect to find out down here? I only want to know my cue, so that I can play up to you."

"Frankly, I don't know if we'll find out anything to-night," Doyle admitted. "It's just an off-chance. But I thought it would be a good thing to get you in, so that you could come and look round on your own, if necessary. By the way, take this—" and he thrust a packet into Richard's hand.

"What is it? Money?"

"Yes. A hundred quid, in fivers. It's all right—Sir Peter gave me a stack of money for expenses. You'd better have a plunge at roulette, or something, or cut into a game. It might look queer if you didn't. Come on."

Richard followed him to a doorway over which hung a heavy curtain.

Pulling the curtain aside, Doyle revealed a large room little lighter than the dim corridor, save for bright globes hung over the card-tables and the roulette wheel.

Some twenty or thirty people were playing, men and women, all masked, and all were too intent on their game to look up as the newcomers entered.

One or two attendants flitted about in their felt slippers, carrying drinks, and a few people sat talking in low tones on the divans that stood against the walls.

As Richard surveyed the scene, he heard a quick movement behind him. Turning quickly, he saw the Chinese "boy" who had been Mah Lee's attendant. She shot an oddly furtive glance at him as she passed, and he caught the sleeve of her jacket impulsively.

"Hullo—" he began, but she snatched her sleeve from his grasp and shook her head. Then, with a quick glance round, she bowed respectfully and slipped away.

Doyle had strolled across the room, and Richard followed him to where an eager group followed the gyrations of the roulette ball.

At the reporter's nudge, Richard joined in the play, while Doyle himself moved aimlessly about the room.

occasionally stopping to watch the fall of the cards at a poker table, or punt a few pounds at baccarat.

Richard won, lost, and won again. Then, gathering up his winnings as though bored, he sat down on a divan and surveyed the room.

Masked though the players were, it was not difficult to see that they were of varied types.

There are three things that betray a man's breeding more than most others: drink, gambling and evening dress. Richard saw that while most of the players were of his own status, there was a leavening of a very different class. Four men, especially, he noticed, playing poker at a table near him. They were heavily-built fellows with prominent jaws. The dinner-jacket of one of them had caught in the back of his chair, and in his hip-pocket Richard noticed a bulge highly suggestive of an automatic pistol.

His observations were cut short by Doyle.

"You're a lucky fellow," said Doyle, in the voice of a man who was not drunk, but who had had more than a few drinks. "Here's Mah Lee, and she's going to let me present you to her."

Richard rose and bowed.

"Miss Vernon," Doyle went on, artistically suppressing a slight hiccup, "let me introduce Mr. Richard Furlong."

The girl smiled and sank on to the divan.

"How do you do?" she said. "I saw you upstairs."

"And I saw you," Richard responded, "and I enjoyed your show immensely."

She made a little *moue*.

"You do not have to be polite—down here," she protested.

"No, but I mean it, really!" he assured her. "You were wonderful. The sincerest compliment I can pay

you is to say that I should have thought you were really Chinese, if Doyle hadn't told me."

"Let's have some champagne!" cried Doyle. "I feel like making merry this evening. Here, waiter!"

The champagne arrived, and Doyle toasted Mah Lee with ceremony.

"How absurd you are!" she said.

She turned to Richard.

"What are you doing in this place?" she asked suddenly.

"What everybody else is doing," he answered lightly, but she shook her head.

"You are not a gambler," she declared with conviction.

"We all have our secret vices."

"So? Perhaps that is true, but yours is not—*this*," and she glanced round the room.

"Nor yours either, perhaps?" Richard suggested.

"Mine? Don't you know that a woman has no vices, and *all* the vices at once?"

"All the virtues, I should have said."

"Now you are being polite to the dancing girl. Very well. I will be the dancing girl. Shall we go up and dance?"

"I should love to."

She rose without more ado.

In the corridor she pressed the button, and waited until a tiny bulb glowed. It was Jimmy's signal that there was someone in the bar, so she made Richard follow her along the corridor to a narrow stair. This she climbed, pushed open a door, and Richard found himself in a small room fitted up as a dressing-room. It had two doors.

"Go out by that door," she said, "turn to the right and you will come to the big room where you saw me.

I will go out by this door. It would look odd if we both came out together."

Richard did as he was bid, not altogether easy at the turn affairs were taking. There was something odd about this girl. Could she suspect him, he wondered? However, it was all in the day's work, he reflected philosophically, as he made his way along the corridor and entered the main room.

Mah Lee, to give her her Chinese pseudonym, was waiting for him, and they began to dance.

Mah Lee was silent, and Richard was content to wait.

"You are strange," she said presently.

"Why?"

"You do not consider it necessary to talk."

"Sorry. But you dance so marvellously that I couldn't think of anything else."

She smiled at that.

"You are clever, too. Oh, not in what you say, but in what you do not say."

Again Richard sought safety in silence.

"Well?" she asked presently.

He smiled down at her.

"You are determined to make a mystery of me," he said, "but I am really a very ordinary person. Doyle brought me here to see the place, and I'm awfully glad he did——"

She laid her fingers lightly on his lips, in a gesture oddly free from coquetry.

"No, you need not make love to me," she assured him. "It is so tiresome."

"I can understand that most men do."

"They think I am a fool," she answered composedly. "They are such fools themselves, not to know that a girl in a place like this is—not a fool!"

"I'm sure you are not, anyway," said Richard, smiling.

The band stopped playing.

"Let us sit down," she said. "I want to talk to you. Give me a cigarette."

She did not talk for some minutes, however, but sat regarding the end of her cigarette with a little frown.

Suddenly she looked straight at him.

"Shall I tell you why you have come, or will you tell me?" she demanded.

"But I have told you——" he began.

"Listen," she interrupted; "I *know*! I am sure. It is about—Mr. Pettigrew," and she caught her breath.

Richard looked blank, but she caught his hand impatiently.

"Do not pretend," she went on hurriedly. "You may trust me. I, too . . . I want to find out . . . But it is dangerous, very dangerous."

Richard hesitated.

"Ah, you think I am trying to bluff you," she said, with sudden anger. "Very well. Shall I tell you that I know all about you? I know that you are employed by Sir Peter. I know that it was you who found out about Baron Karst. I know that you are a detec——"

"All this is quite true," he interrupted coolly, "but, really, I don't see what it has to do with my paying a visit to a respectable night club."

"Respectable!" She laughed. "And you have been downstairs!"

"Oh, *that*——" he smiled.

She sat silent for quite a long time.

"What are you thinking of?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Wondering why men are such fools!" she retorted.

"I am included this time?"

"Why not? I try to help you, and you will not let me."

Richard took a sudden resolution.

"You knew Mr. Pettigrew?" he asked.

She nodded, her face clouded.

"He used to come here?"

"Yes, often."

"And you think——?"

"I don't know what to think!" she burst out. "Stop! I know what I *think*, but one may think many things that are—foolish. It is what one knows that matters."

"And what do you know, then?"

"Why should I tell you?" she answered bitterly. "You do not trust me."

"I might ask, why should I trust you?" Richard answered calmly; "but somehow I think I *do* trust you."

She looked up swiftly at that.

"You mean it?"

He nodded gravely, and her eyes grew soft.

"Thank you," she murmured. "Listen: You want to find out who killed him; it is your business. I, too, want to find out. Why? That is *my* business, my friend. But since we both want to do the same thing, let us help each other. But you must be careful. It is not safe for you here."

"Why not?"

She looked round her apprehensively.

"I cannot tell you—I am willing to help you in this thing, but I cannot tell you more just now."

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, you men! A woman would have understood."

"Why are you so interested in Pettigrew's death?"

Her eyes met his, and then he understood.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You—loved him?" She rose.

"It is time that you went," she said. "Let us find Mr. Doyle. But swear to me that you will not tell even him what I have said to you."

"But——"

"You have said that you trusted me, and I—I have risked more than you can guess to say what I have said. Will you not promise?"

"Very well, but——"

She made a quick gesture, and he saw Carson coming towards them.

"Hope you're having a good time?" smiled the manager.

"Topping, thanks," Richard responded. "I was just telling Miss Vernon how marvellously she dances."

He smiled his way past, and Mah Lee hurried him outside, into the dressing room and so downstairs.

The gambling room was nearly empty, but the four heavy-jowled men were still at their poker, playing in a sullen silence that suggested frayed tempers.

Doyle sat on his divan, apparently a good deal the worse for wear, and Mah Lee touched his shoulder.

"Wake up," she cried. "Mr. Furlong is going home."

At that one of the poker-players half-turned in his chair.

"Shut up!" he growled.

Richard looked at him, and he flushed.

"Well, what are you staring at?" he demanded truculently.

"I was looking at you," Richard replied quietly.

"Well, look at someone else."

"With pleasure," said Richard, and Doyle laughed.

The man sprang up, overturning his chair, and thrust his face close to Richard's.

"Who the 'ell do you think you are?" he snarled, and then everything seemed to happen in a hurry.

Doyle jumped up, and was sent staggering back by a push from one of the others. Richard caught a thick chin with his fist, and saw a pistol snatched from a hip-

pocket. Even as it rose, its owner's arm was knocked aside by the hand of the girl who had been Mah Lee's attendant.

Richard, struggling with two men at once, saw a hand snatch at the girl, miss her, but grab her pigtail, dragging off her tight cap and revealing golden hair beneath it.

Then someone hit him on the head, and he reeled, but recovered and sent his antagonist sprawling.

Suddenly the lights went out.

Sick and dizzy, he felt a small hand clasp his and he was half-led, half-pushed, through the darkness, guided up a short stair, and presently found himself clinging to an iron railing with the night air cool on his forehead.

He hung there for some time, but soon recovered enough to realise that someone was lying near him.

He stooped and struck a match.

It was Doyle, his collar half torn off, his shirt crumpled, and his coat torn.

"Doyle! Doyle!" he said, and shook the recumbent figure.

The reporter sat up and gasped.

"Hullo!" he muttered. Then, as his head cleared: "I say, Furlong. I'm terribly sorry about this. It was my fault for bringing you."

"Cut that out!" Richard interrupted. "Let's clear off. We can talk things over to-morrow."

Arm-in-arm they made their way along until a lighted street welcomed them. They set themselves in what order they could, and presently got a taxi.

"I'll drop you first," said Doyle, and left Furlong in Jermyn Street.

Richard got himself a stiff drink, swallowed it and felt better.

Then he sat down and considered things.

For nearly an hour he sat there, his face drawn and set.

At last, with a grim little smile, he rose and stretched himself.

"Well," he muttered, "it has been an interesting problem. Richard, my lad, you may be several kinds of a fool, as the Angel said, but even fools blunder on the truth sometimes!"

CHAPTER XIII

A sound sleep followed by a cold bath; there is no better prescription for the cure of a thickish head.

After these simple medicines had done their work, Richard sat down to an excellent breakfast with an appetite that made the experienced Mr. Pratt nod contentedly.

Richard looked at the morning's *Courier* as he ate; then, the meal over, he lit a pipe and considered his plan of campaign.

He had done some hard thinking the night before, despite his aching head, but he knew by experience how differently one can regard a problem after a night's rest.

He ran over the events of the previous night at the Mandarin club.

First, there was the cardinal point: the Angel. In the excitement of the scuffle he had caught only a glimpse of that mass of golden hair previously hidden by the black cap, but he was absolutely convinced that the Chinese "boy" who had been Mah Lee's attendant was none other than Angela Farren.

She was cleverly made up, of course, but Richard was sufficiently familiar with the art of disguise to know how easily that could be arranged.

He remembered how Sergeant Reed, himself a master of the art, had pulled his leg once. Reed, in the rôle of a destitute sailor, had actually sold him a box of matches in the street—yet the police officer's disguise had been more a matter of suitable clothing, and above all his perfect playing of the part, than of actual facial make-up.

The Chinese "boy" was Angela Farren. He felt quite certain of that. But what was she doing in the Mandarin club, and in such a garb?

If she had gone there as an ordinary visitor he might have assumed that she was there on the same quest as himself—to find out what she could about Pettigrew's private life.

But to find her apparently one of the staff—that was a development that gave him furiously to think.

He began to suspect that the Angel knew more even than he had given her credit for, and the reflection was not a pleasant one.

Then there was Mah Lee; or Lucile Vernon, to give her her real name.

He recalled Mah Lee's confidential talk with him, and wondered how much—if any—faith he should put in her assurances.

She had warned him that he was in grave danger. Was that merely a bluff to keep him away from the club? Or was she sincere in her promise to help him?

He felt pretty sure that he had hit on the truth when he suggested that she had been in love with Pettigrew; but love will make a woman do strange things.

On the one hand, it might be that Mah Lee was determined to track down Pettigrew's murderer. On the other hand, it was possible that Pettigrew had in some way aroused her jealousy, and that she had herself been in some way at least partly responsible for his death.

As to the fight in which he had been so nearly knocked out, it seemed at least highly probable that it had been

pre-arranged. But if so, by whom? By Carson? He had disliked the fellow at sight, and Doyle had hinted that he was a dubious character. Or by Dr. Wang? For the life of him, Richard could not make up his mind about that bland Celestial.

There were, he felt, so many loose ends to this tangled skein that it was difficult to know which one to pull to unravel it. He had formed a theory, and the more he considered it the more he liked it; but he realised that theories are perilous things, and a false move now might ruin all his plans.

He was interrupted by Pratt, who announced that Mr. Doyle wanted to see him.

Richard hesitated. He was very anxious that the reporter should not think that he, Richard, blamed him for the rough handling he had received at the club, so he resolved to make light of the whole affair.

"Show him in, Pratt," he said.

Doyle appeared, looking chastened.

"I say," he began at once, "I'm terribly sorry about last night."

"Don't talk rot!" Richard interrupted cheerfully. "Why on earth should you blame yourself? It was all rather amusing, and I'm none the worse for the scrap. If it comes to that, you took a bit of a knock yourself. How do you feel?"

"A bit of a headache," Doyle confessed. "But I must be honest with you, Furlong. I was tight. It was damn silly of me, of course, but I got rather bored waiting while you were dancing with Mah Lee, and I just sat and soaked. Then, when the row broke out, I wasn't much good, I'm afraid."

"Nonsense! I saw you land one of those fellows a stiff knock. He'll have a black eye this morning, if I'm any judge."

"It's nice of you to take it like that, but I can't let

myself down quite so lightly. Look here, I'll tell you something. There's a popular idea that all newspaper men drink. That's all bunk. One of the smartest men I know has been a teetotaller all his life. In the old days it was true enough, but the new type of journalist is quite a different person from the old penny-a-liner who ranked rather below a second footman. But in my particular job, unfortunately, a man has *got* to drink. You'd be surprised if you knew the number of whiskies I have to shift in a day. I get half my information in pubs. I meet a detective, or a nark, or some other bloke who may be useful, and I buy him a drink—and of course I have to have one myself."

"Naturally."

"You'd think that would make me sick of drinking," Doyle went on; "but as a matter of fact it grows into a habit. Every now and then, like last night, I get fed up with things generally, and then I go off the deep end."

"I understand," Richard assured him. "Don't say any more about it. Now, about this club and its merry men: I've been thinking a bit. I suppose there's no doubt that row was staged for our benefit?"

"I wish I could remember more about it," Doyle admitted ruefully. "I remember those four toughs, though. I've seen them there before. Of course, that beggar Carson may have paid them to start the trouble, but I'm half-inclined to think it was just their own beastly aggressiveness. After all, it would pay Carson better not to have any trouble, don't you think?"

"There's something in that, certainly."

"I don't say that if Carson suspected you he wouldn't be glad to have you knocked on the head, but one would think he'd have planned it less clumsily. By the way, I suppose you'll call in the Yard people?"

"Why should I? In the first place, I went there of

my own accord, and I was ready to take whatever was coming to me. In the second place, if I go to the police I queer your pitch into the bargain."

Doyle looked at him curiously.

"You're a hell of a good sport," he said slowly. "Too good for a job like this."

Richard laughed.

"That's one of the nicest compliments I've ever had," he answered; "but spare my blushes. After all, what good would it do if I got Reed to raid the place and close it? If there really is anything to be found out there about Pettigrew's murder, that would be the worst thing I could do. Don't you see that my best game is to turn up at the club as if nothing had happened? Carson will probably apologise and say he's had those four toughs thrown out, and we shall all be the best of friends. Incidentally, it will be the only way of getting you forgiven for having taken me down to the gambling room."

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm prepared to stand the racket. I took you there and landed you in the row, and that's that. But if you really feel that way about it, I must say I think you're right—though it sounds like an easy get-out for me."

"Forget that. What we've got to do is to find the man who killed Pettigrew. Nothing else matters. That's settled. Now, I wonder if you'd do something for me?"

"Like a bird. What is it?"

"Get on the track of Dr. Wang. That old man interests me. You've got a million ways of finding things out about people, with your newspaper experience. I don't feel sure about that old chap. He may be up to his eyebrows in this racket, or he may be completely innocent. I think it might help a lot if we could find out more about him—his earlier life; when and where he first met Carson; and so on. I've several times got

astonishingly useful tips by digging up a man's history."

"You're quite right. It might be a very good line of country. In any case it's worth trying. I'll get on the job at once, if you like."

"Thanks, I wish you would. I'm off down to the *Courier* to hand out some dope to Sir Peter. By the way, I don't think we need mention this business of the Mandarin to him just yet."

"All right," Doyle agreed; "but you sound almost as though you thought Sir Peter himself had killed Pettigrew," he added, grinning.

"Well, you never know," Richard responded coolly.

"Eh?" said the reporter, startled.

"My dear fellow, this business has got so thoroughly tangled up that I'd suspect Sergeant Reed himself if things seemed to point that way! I only mean that until we've got something definite to work on, it's not a bit of good forcing the pace. We must just go on getting hold of a bit of information here and another somewhere else, and trying to piece them together into something like a reasonable theory."

"You're right. I only wish I'd been of more help."

"You've helped enormously, and it was thanks to you that we found out that Pettigrew used to go to the Mandarin. By the way, would you have time to see Vance, and make sure he's got everything he wants?"

"Surely. The poor bloke must be pretty lonely."

"He'll have to put up with that for a bit, I'm afraid. I wonder what Reed is up to. He didn't let much come out before he got the coroner to adjourn the inquest."

"He doesn't seem to be doing much."

"Don't you believe it. Reed is a cute bird. I wouldn't put it past him to have shadowed us to the Mandarin."

"You think so? But he'd have chipped in and raided the place when the row started."

"Not necessarily, if he thought we were all right."

He likes to wait until he's sure of his game before he pounces. But that's only an idea. Anyhow, don't imagine that he's letting the grass grow under his feet."

"Well," said Doyle, rising, "I'd better get a move on. I suppose it's rather petty of me, but I must admit I'd like to put one over on him. I've seen a lot of police work, and I've often thought I'd like to try and beat them at their own game."

"That's the spirit! Cheer-ho, then. You might 'phone Miss Farren now and then as to your movements, so that I can keep in touch with you."

"I will. I'm afraid the poor girl is worried stiff about Vance. Good-bye. I'll let you know as soon as possible whatever I find out about old Wang."

When Doyle had gone, Richard drove to the *Courier* office, and put his hat and coat in the room allotted to him.

Then he strolled along to Angela Farren's room, but found no one there.

He went to Sir Peter's room, where he found the newspaper owner dictating a letter to a girl secretary whose face was strange to him.

"Come in, Furlong," said Theale. "Excuse me half a minute, will you, while I finish this letter?"

He dictated a few more lines.

"That's all just now, Miss Young," he said, and the girl left the room. "Well," he went on, "what's the news?"

"Very little, I'm afraid; but Doyle and I have got some useful irons in the fire."

Sir Peter snorted, but restrained himself; he remembered his previous passage at arms with Richard.

"It takes time, I suppose," he said.

"It certainly does," Richard agreed. "I quite understand your impatience, but we are really doing everything we possibly can."

"I'm sure you are, but it gets on one's nerves a bit. Young Vance, you know . . . It's upset that girl Angela Farren, too."

"I saw you had a new secretary," Richard remarked, with apparent indifference.

"Yes—temporarily. Miss Farren telephoned this morning. She's been heading for a breakdown ever since she had the shock of finding poor Pettigrew's body. I wanted her to take a rest, but she wouldn't. But she admitted this morning that she would have to take things quietly for a bit."

"Quite right; I hope you told her to go into a nursing home and do it thoroughly?"

"Nursing home? She wouldn't hear of it! No; she's taken her little car and gone off for a few days in the country—easy stages, you know, stopping a night wherever she feels inclined. It's the most restful kind of holiday I know."

"I see. But isn't that a bit awkward?"

"Why?"

"She might be wanted to give evidence, or something."

"She thought of that herself, and arranged to keep in touch with me from time to time."

"That's all right, then," said Richard cheerfully, and proceeded to discuss the Pettigrew crime—without saying anything of the slightest importance—until it was time for Sir Peter's morning conference.

Then he cleared out and sauntered off to the Tape Room, where he inquired whether there happened to be any letters for him. The reply was in the negative, as he had expected, but the question gave him an opportunity to chat for a few minutes with the man in charge about the various machines under his control.

While they talked, Richard contrived to sidle near enough to one of the walls to glance at a framed list of

printed names, addresses and telephone numbers of various members of the staff.

Ten minutes later he was in Clifford's Inn, where Angela, it seemed, had a flat.

He found her quarters without difficulty, and rang the bell.

"Good-morning," he said to the respectable woman who opened the door. "I am a friend of Miss Farren."

"She's not in, sir," the woman interrupted civilly. "She's gone away to the country for a few days."

"I know," he answered; "she has just telephoned to me. She asked me to go to her garage and give the manager a message for her, but I've very stupidly forgotten which garage she said it was, so I came along to see if I could find out."

"It's the All-Service garage, in Farringdon Avenue, sir."

"Thank you very much; I'll go round there at once."

He left the inn and set off for Farringdon Avenue with considerable satisfaction, for he had so far obtained the information he wanted without, he believed, arousing anyone's suspicion.

It was hardly likely that Angela could have prepared the housekeeper, or charwoman, whichever she was, for his visit. It was always possible, of course, that Angela might ring up her flat and ask the woman if anyone had called; but that was a risk he had to take.

Meanwhile, he had learned definitely that Angela had returned home after her visit to the Mandarin. He had no doubt that her story of needing an immediate holiday was simply a ruse to avoid his questions.

He admired her cleverness, not for the first time. It was obvious that she received a comfortable salary from Sir Peter—hence the flat, the housekeeper, and the car—and she would therefore have funds to enable her to vanish conveniently for a reasonable time. To have

simply disappeared would have been to attract immediate and unwelcome attention to herself. Sir Peter, for example, would have set Scotland Yard by the ears.

But the arrangement by which she was to cruise about from place to place was admirable; it was heartily approved by Sir Peter, and it made it extremely difficult for any other person to follow her trail, with the roads almost crowded with small cars.

Richard, however, was determined to satisfy himself that she really had gone, and was not merely hiding in her flat with the connivance of her woman.

Presently he entered the All-Service garage and asked for the manager.

"He's out just now," replied a man in overalls; "but I'm the foreman. Can I do anything for you, sir?"

"Thanks; I expect you can," Richard answered. "Here's my card. I'm a friend of Miss Farren. After she'd taken out her car this morning she telephoned and asked me to come and inquire if she had left a pair of driving gloves here. If not, she must have left them in a shop she called at. She tried to get you on the 'phone, but you were engaged, so she rang me up instead."

"I haven't heard of anything being found, sir," the man replied. "But if you'll come with me, we'll have a look round."

He led the way down the long building and called to a man whose feet protruded from beneath a large car.

"Bill!"

A muffled shout responded, the feet began to squirm toward them, and presently a grimy man with red hair emerged.

"You saw to Miss Farren's car this morning, didn't you?" asked the foreman.

Bill drew the back of his hand across his forehead and nodded.

"See anything of a pair of driving gloves of hers?"

Bill reflected.

"She's got a pair of driving gloves," he said, with some pride in his powers of recollection. "I know she 'as, because I've seen 'em. She showed 'em to me last week. New, they was; she said so. But I can't say whether she 'ad 'em with 'er this morning, because I didn't 'ave no cause to take particular notice."

"Miss Farren asked this gentleman to come and see if she'd left 'em behind," the foreman explained.

"We can soon find *that* out, sir," Bill declared. "Just come over 'ere—that's where she keeps 'er car, and I don't see no gloves there."

He pointed to a small corner.

"Miss Farren doesn't use a lock-up?" Richard asked.

"No, sir; we takes care of 'er car for 'er. Nice little car it is, too; and I will say she knows 'ow to 'andle it."

"Yes, they're nice cars, them baby Austins," the foreman chimed in; "for a small party, that is."

"No gloves 'ere that I can see," said Bill, who had been looking round.

"Thanks," said Richard. "She must have made a mistake. Sorry to have bothered you," and he slipped into Bill's hand a tip that made that worthy wish he were bothered similarly every day.

Richard, having similarly gratified the foreman, took a taxi to the Yard and asked for Sergeant Reed.

"I wish you'd do a little thing for me," he explained, when they had exchanged greetings.

"Glad to, Mr. Furlong, if I can. What is it?"

"Give me a note to the department that looks after the registration of cars, will you? I want to trace a number."

Reed smiled, wrote a number on a slip of paper and handed it to him.

"Perhaps I can save you a little trouble," he said. "That is the number of Miss Farren's car."

Richard stared at him in discomfiture.

"Damn you, Reed!" he said. "How did you know what I wanted?"

The detective chuckled.

"It would be interesting to know why she left London so hurriedly this morning, wouldn't it?" he replied. "Don't worry about trying to trace her. We are better fixed for that sort of work, you know—though it won't be exactly easy."

For a moment Richard was on the brink of blurting out what had happened at the Mandarin club. Then he remembered his promise to Doyle.

"I'm not sure how much you know," he said. "I'd like to tell you one or two things I've picked up, but I'm in a most unusual position. If I told you, I'd have to bring somebody else into it——"

"That's all right, Mr. Furlong," the detective interrupted. "I think I've an idea what you mean, but we needn't mention any names. Perhaps it may turn out that you and I are working on very much the same line."

"It's very decent of you to take it like that."

"Why, look here, sir," Reed answered frankly, "I may as well be plain with you. We know you and we know we can trust you—otherwise I might not be so ready to help and ask no questions. You keep your secrets and I'll keep mine. Perhaps you'll be wanting our help pretty badly one of these days. When you do want it, it'll be ready for you, take that from me."

The sergeant had dropped his bantering manner and was eyeing Richard shrewdly as he spoke.

"Thanks," said Richard quietly; "and don't forget that if I'm lucky enough to find the man who killed Pettigrew, you'll have the job of arresting him."

Reed's eyes twinkled.

"I'll have the handcuffs ready," he said.

CHAPTER XIV

THE average police detective is a man of modest reticence; he is reticent because that is a quality essential to his success, and modest because that is a condition of the Force to which he belongs.

He is patient and persevering in the last degree, but he will tell you quite frankly that he allows for a percentage of luck—good or bad—in handling his cases.

Luck, the element of chance; or, as some people prefer to regard it, the coincidental arrangement of events by which a benevolent providence mitigates to some extent the appalling mess human beings industriously make of their world.

Whatever be the best definition of the word, Richard experienced a remarkable stroke of luck when he left Scotland Yard.

He passed out of the courtyard by the Embankment gate, crossed the road, and stood watching a fussy tug puffing her way importantly upstream, towing a string of heavy barges that looked like sullen marine monsters in captivity.

Richard was not feeling too good. He was philosopher enough to smile at the set-back to his vanity of finding that his little discovery of Angela Farren's disappearance was shared by Sergeant Reed. He knew, too, that the Yard were far more likely to trace her movements than he was. Indeed, he had gone there to obtain the number of her car more to complete his inquiry, and to possess the information in case of emergency, than with any intention of trying to follow her unless it became absolutely necessary.

But he was by no means clear as to his next move. He felt that he was swimming in deep water.

He had sent Doyle off to investigate Dr. Wang's affairs more to keep that energetic reporter busy than in the hope that he would produce information of any real value.

Not for the first time in his criminological career, Richard felt that he was up against a dead end.

Like Mr. Micawber, he was forced to hope that something would turn up—a position that annoyed him, for he preferred to turn things up for himself.

He turned away impatiently and walked the few yards to Westminster Bridge, and there it was that luck unexpectedly befriended him.

There was a traffic jam, and as he was about to take advantage of it to cross the road, a little Austin car slid up and stopped.

At the driving wheel sat Angela Farren.

Richard acted promptly. Leaving the pavement, he raised his hat with a pleasant smile, opened the car door, stepped in and sat down beside the girl.

Angela's colour came and went as she stared at him in angry astonishment.

"May I remind you that the people behind are getting impatient?" he asked cheerfully, as the traffic in front moved on, and drivers behind began to hoot madly.

Angela muttered something which it is to be feared was not perfectly polite, but the negotiation of the traffic that seethes round the Houses of Parliament needed all her attention for the next few moments.

She let her clutch in suddenly, and the car moved on with a vicious jerk.

"A little out of practice, but I expect you don't get much time for driving," Richard remarked.

She handled the car well, despite Richard's jibe, and

they were presently bowling down Victoria Street at an easy pace.

"Where can I drop you?" Angela asked curtly.

"I'm in no hurry, thanks," he answered.

She passed a motor 'bus, and then shot him a furious glance.

"I am going to stop," she declared, "and if you don't get out I shall call a policeman."

"If you do that," he retorted. "I'll ask him to arrest you on charges of being concerned in the conduct of a place where they play illegal games of chance, and possible complicity in a recent murder."

It was a risky move, but the bluff was successful. Angela's hands tightened on the wheel, and the car swerved dangerously, but she recovered control before any harm was done.

"I don't understand you," she said, but her voice trembled.

"I think you understand very well," he replied. "Be reasonable, Miss Farren. We've got to talk things over sooner or later. Why not now?"

"Where?"

"I suppose I dare not suggest that you have lunch with me?"

Her lip curled.

"But why not?" he urged. "Look here, we're just coming to Victoria Station. Suppose we go there? I can't very well put you through the Third Degree, or have you drugged and abducted, with about a thousand respectable railway officials looking on, can I?"

Angela smiled despite herself.

"I think you're the most extraordinarily impudent person I've ever met," she declared, but she swung the car into the station yard, nevertheless.

Indefinite parking is not encouraged in station yards, but the metallic argument which Richard produced con-

vinced a railway official that this was one of those cases in which a wise discretion should be exercised.

Richard had been cunning in his choice of venue. It was still fairly early, and the big grill-room was not crowded. An intelligent head waiter found them a table for two in a corner in which they could not be overheard.

Lovers, he decided; forbidden by their parents to meet; she's a bit young for him . . . nice bit of stuff . . . he looks on the square, too, but you never know. . . .

None of these reflections appeared on his face as he took Richard's order with respectful solicitude, but Richard caught the Angel's eye, and she laughed.

"Quite romantic, isn't it?" he remarked. "I expect he thinks you've got a passport for the Continent, in a married name, in your handbag."

"Perhaps I have," she murmured, but he shook his head.

"I don't think so," he answered; "but don't let's talk shop now. Here are the cocktails."

Angela ate her food with frank enjoyment. The omelette, especially, was excellent, and Richard had found a Pouilly on the wine-list.

When their waiter had served the coffee and departed, Richard produced his cigarette case.

"Before we talk what I may call business," he began, "let me make one point clear: it was very nice of you to come and lunch with me, but I don't want you to think I'm going to take advantage of that. Even enemies can break bread together during an armistice, you know."

She smiled thoughtfully.

"You insist on regarding me as an enemy, then?" she asked.

"I think you were a very good friend to me in the Mandarin club the other night," he answered bluntly.

"You probably saved my life. But perhaps you are going to deny that you were there at all?"

"Why should I?"

"I hardly expected to see you there."

"I hardly expected to see *you* there."

"Then we are quits as far as that is concerned."

"Will you tell me something?" she asked.

"What is it?"

"Does Sir Peter know?"

"I certainly have not told him."

"That was—nice of you."

"I'm afraid it was more on his account than on yours. You see, he believes in you."

"And you don't?"

Richard shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't blame you," she said unexpectedly.

"If I were a police officer," he remarked, "it would be my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

"Then you can hardly expect me to say anything, except that I enjoyed my lunch very much."

Richard sat silent.

"I wish you'd tell me exactly what you *do* think!" she flashed out in sudden exasperation.

"What do you expect me to think?" he retorted. "I see you in the *Courier* office, a most correct private secretary. I try to discuss things with you, and you tell me I'm all the kinds of fool there are. Then I meet you in a dubious night club, disguised as a Chinese boy, and next morning you bolt from your flat to avoid being questioned. What do you expect me to make of all that?"

"If you knew . . ."

"Perhaps I know more than you think," he said, and at that she started.

"What do you know?" she demanded; but he shook his head.

"You can't expect me to trust you, if you don't trust me," he answered.

"Why don't you tell Scotland Yard what *you* know?" she countered swiftly. "Don't you trust them?"

"I have my own reasons."

"So have I."

"That's what every burglar says."

"That's not quite fair."

"I think it is. If it comes to that, why don't *you* go to the Yard?"

"For the same reason that you don't."

"What is that?"

"You want to find out who killed Mr. Pettigrew. So do I—to save Terry."

"Don't you know who killed him?"

She hesitated.

"Why should I know?" she demanded.

Richard blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"Oh, well," he said, "if you won't tell me, you won't, and that's all there is to it."

"Why don't you have me arrested, if you're so sure that I—if you suspect me? I might run away."

"I can always find you if I want you; but I'm not ready—yet."

"I suppose you've told your police friends to watch me?"

"My police friends are watching you already, without requiring any suggestion from me."

She shivered a little.

"Altogether, young lady, you've got yourself into rather a nasty hole," he went on, pursuing his advantage.

"I can't say what Sergeant Reed intends to do——"

"He can do what he likes!" she broke in defiantly.

"He will, with or without your permission or mine,"

he assured her grimly. "You've been clever, but not clever enough. If I were you I should try and explain your mysterious proceedings."

"I suppose you think you'll frighten me?"

"No. I think it would take a good deal to frighten you; but I'm trying to make you be reasonable. I'll be brutally frank: if you are innocent—I mean, if you have done nothing wrong in the eyes of the law—you've nothing to fear. If not——" he paused significantly.

She ground the end of her cigarette into an ashtray.

"If not, I'll get all I deserve," she said. "I'm sorry, Mr. Furlong, but I must go my own way. If I told you what I *could* tell you, I'm afraid you'd spoil things. I can't help what you think of me, but I'm grateful to you for not telling Sir Peter. He's been very good to me, and I should hate him to be worried."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Well, as you apparently don't propose to take me to prison, I think I'll continue my trip. I'm taking a few days' holiday in the country, you know," and she smiled faintly.

"I see, and I've no doubt you will telephone to Sir Peter every day from a call-office, reporting your arrival at Little Podbury-on-the-Pond, or somewhere, to keep him quiet."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that I might really want to get away from things for a bit?"

"We needn't argue about it. Do please give me credit for a little intelligence."

"Shall I send you picture postcards? But, as you say, we needn't argue about it. One thing you may be sure of: I shall be in London as soon as I'm needed. Now, I've a feeling that my nose is horribly shiny, so I'll go and powder it while you finish your coffee."

She vanished in the direction of the cloakroom, leaving Richard to frown at his coffee cup.

He was still frowning five minutes later when the waiter brought him a piece of paper torn from a notebook and twisted into a tiny cocked-hat. He unfolded it and read, scribbled in pencil :

Thanks so much for the lunch. Forgive me for running away—it was really no good arguing, was it? Au revoir.
A.F.

Richard kept his countenance under the observant eye of the waiter.

"That's all right, then," he remarked contentedly. "Give me my bill, waiter."

He paid, took his hat, and hurried down to the courtyard.

Angela's car had disappeared.

CHAPTER XV

RICHARD went home to his rooms in Jermyn Street thoroughly disgruntled.

He was not only annoyed at the simple stratagem by which the Angel had ended their conversation; he was chagrined at his second failure to extract any information from her.

And yet, he asked himself, what else could he have done? Suppose he had forced her to accompany him to Scotland Yard, what charge could he have preferred against her? It might be remarkable for a business girl to pose as a Chinese servant in a night club, but it was no crime, unless it could be proved that she was engaged in illegal proceedings. And besides, he had his own reasons for preferring that she should not be hindered in carrying out whatever mysterious operations she had in hand.

But he had hoped to bluff her into explaining her object, and the method by which she hoped to attain it.

He had a twinge of conscience, too, when he remembered how she had come to his aid in the fight.

Well, he had had his chance, and muffed it, and it was no good crying over a dropped catch. He rang for Pratt. "Any message from Mr. Doyle?" he asked.

The taciturn one shook his head; like Grimaud, the good Pratt never wasted words.

An idea occurred to Richard, and he went to the telephone and rang up a certain club.

"I want to speak to Lord Roodacre," he said.

He knew his father's habits. At that moment, when in town, Lord Roodacre should be half-way through his second glass of old port.

Presently the expected voice was heard.

"What the devil do you want?" it inquired gruffly.

"Awfully sorry to bother you, sir," Richard apologised.

"So I should think! What is it? Up to your detective games again, I suppose, and want the old man's help, eh?"

The distinguished ex-diplomat chuckled. He was secretly rather proud of his younger son's success, though at first he had been restive at the idea of Richard "doing the work of a damned policeman."

"I just wanted to ask you a question," Richard explained. "I ran across a queer old bird the other day. He said he'd met you. Name of Wang. Been a mandarin and what-not in the old days in China. Said he didn't think you'd remember him, but of course I know what a marvellous memory you have."

This was good work. Lord Roodacre was, indeed, famed for his remarkable recollection of men and events, and rather liked being reminded of the fact.

"Wang?" the deep voice rumbled. "Wait a minute, lad. . . . Wang. . . . I've got him. Yes, he was a biggish figure in his day. Not a bad sort, either. I knew a good deal about him, though oddly enough we didn't actually meet for years. What d'you want to know about him?"

"Oh, I just wondered if he was pretending to know you. Decent sort of bird, was he?"

"Yes. Mind you, Orientals have their own code of decency, as it were, but according to his lights Wang was a man who tried to do the right thing by his people. All the same, I'd rather have him for a friend than an enemy—like most Chinese. What's he doing now?"

"Just living here," said Richard vaguely. "He told me he'd given up politics."

"They gave *him* up," chuckled Lord Roodacre. "He was lucky to save his skin in the turmoil that followed the revolution. Anything else you want to know?"

"No, sir, and thanks awfully."

Richard put down the telephone, giving private thanks for a parent who refrained from inquisitive questioning.

Then he became aware of Pratt at his elbow, holding a salver on which lay a letter.

"Just come, sir," the servant explained. "Brought by a messenger—a Chink, he looks."

Richard tore open the envelope. Inside was a sheet of thin paper on which was written in green ink :

Dear Mr. Furlong,—I hope you will give me the privilege of resuming the delightful conversation we began at the club. If you are not engaged will you drink a cup of tea with me at four o'clock? My messenger awaits your reply.

WANG.

Richard hesitated. Then he went out to the little hall, where a Chinese boy in European dress greeted him with a respectful bow.

"Say to your master that I shall have the honour of calling on him at four o'clock," he directed, and the boy bowed and departed.

Richard returned to the sitting-room and re-read Dr. Wang's letter. Now that he had accepted the invitation, he began to wonder whether he had been wise to do so. Once in Dr. Wang's house, who knew what might happen?

Richard often heard people laugh at novelists' stories of men being quietly knocked on the head in apparently respectable London houses. He did not laugh. His association with the police had given him some idea of the amount of undiscovered crime in the capital alone.

He realised how easy it was, for example, to murder a man; and then place his body on a quiet road in the dark hours of night, with a broken driving-mirror, or a fragment of a headlamp, beside it. The sequel would be a broadcast S.O.S. asking for any witnesses of an accident in which an unknown motor-car had knocked down and killed the Honourable Richard Furlong, and then driven away.

That was one expedient, and there were plenty of others by which an inconvenient person could be got out of the way.

Was Dr. Wang aware that he, Richard, had been man-handled in the night club? Or did he believe that Richard would not connect him with the affair?

Richard paced the room, trying to balance the chances. Then his jaw set obstinately. He would go and see Wang, he determined, and take the risk; and if Wang tried any tricks, he would blow his head off.

He was loading his automatic when Pratt came into the room.

"Tea, sir?" the man inquired.

"No, thanks. I'm going to have tea with a Dr. Wang

at—where's that letter? There's the address, in Abbey Road. That's in St. John's Wood, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Let's see. It's nearly half-past three. Telephone for the car, will you?"

Pratt telephoned to the garage. Then he went out, to return presently with a bowler hat in one hand and a formidable stick in the other.

"What's the idea?" Richard demanded.

Pratt pointed to Richard's hip pocket.

"Pistol. Escort," he replied.

Richard laughed.

"I don't want an escort," he returned, then paused. "Wait a minute, though," he went on. "That's not a bad notion, Pratt. It might be as well for you to drive the car instead of Rawlings. You've got a chauffeur's cap, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Get it."

When the car arrived the chauffeur was sent back to the garage and Pratt took the wheel. Richard got in beside him.

"We've plenty of time, so just drive round the Park a bit, first," he directed.

It was not the first time Pratt had helped him in his criminological adventures, and Richard knew that he could depend on his former batman's courage and shrewdness.

"I'm going to see this Dr. Wang, as I told you," he said. "He may be all right, and he may not. You'll sit in the car outside the house, and keep your ears open. If you hear me yell, or if I fire my pistol, you'll have to use your own discretion. If there's a bobby about, call him and dash in. If not, don't forget it's your job to get help. Don't butt in and get caught, or we'll both be in the cart."

"Can't I come in with you, sir?"

"No, you can't. You'll do as I told you: that's an order."

Pratt's right hand left the wheel and went to the peak of his cap.

"Very good, sir," he answered, as though on parade.

Dr. Wang lived in a large house standing in its own garden in the quietest part of Abbey Road.

Before Richard could ring the bell the door was flung open and a Chinese man-servant, in the irreproachable black tie and tail coat of a London butler, bowed him into a wide hall, took his hat and gloves, and preceded him to a room on the right, where Dr. Wang sat in a great arm-chair in front of a wood fire.

The old man looked curiously small and frail as he rose to receive Richard with the ritual formula: "My poor house is at your service."

He no longer wore his magnificent mandarin's robe. A grey lounge suit hung loosely on his shrunken body, and his thin neck was circled by a linen collar of old-fashioned cut, and a black silk scarf-tie.

"It is indeed kind of you," he said, "to come and see an old man in his retreat. Try that chair. You will smoke? There are cigars and cigarettes in the box on the table beside you."

Richard responded suitably and sat down, and Dr. Wang smiled as he intercepted a glance at his attire.

"You had expected something more reminiscent of the Far East, perhaps?" he remarked. "No. I have cut myself off from all that. In Rome, I do as the Romans do. On ceremonial occasions, it is true, I wear the dress of ceremony; and I am afraid that I assume it at the Mandarin club for vulgar commercial ends. It goes against the grain, but Carson insists that it is what he calls an asset."

He spread out his thin fingers in a deprecatory gesture.

"Let us talk of other things," he went on, as the manservant entered with a tray. "You are a tea-drinker? Or perhaps a whisky and soda——?"

"Tea, please," said Richard. "It is almost a vice of mine. I take it at all hours of the day and night."

"So? Then I hope you will like this. It is sent to me by some of the friends I still possess in China."

The pale liquid, brewed to perfection, was exquisite; its flavour seemed to be enhanced by the delicate, handleless cups in which it was served.

"There are sweetmeats, cakes and so forth," said Dr. Wang. "No?" He sipped his tea with appreciation, holding the cup with both hands.

"I was speaking to my father to-day, before I received your message," Richard remarked. "I recalled your name to him."

"He would not remember me," the old man replied, shaking his head.

"On the contrary, he remembered you very well."

Dr. Wang sat up.

"Indeed?" he cried. "Your honourable father does me too much honour. Will you present to him my greetings at a favourable opportunity?"

"With pleasure. May I say that he not only remembered you, but spoke of you in terms of the highest esteem?"

Dr. Wang put down his cup, folded his hands and bowed.

"This person is overwhelmed," he answered gravely. "Nevertheless, it is written: 'The superior man has dignified ease without pride.' Your honourable father is a superior man. He did not, I presume, recount to you the circumstances of our association?"

"He did not go into details."

"It is written: 'Things that are done it is needless to speak about.' I am content to emulate his discretion.

Yet it is only right that I should say to you, his son, one thing: your honourable father, many years ago, aided me in a certain matter. To him, perhaps, it was a small thing; to me, it was vital. He may have forgotten it; I have not. He is still a Great One; I am of the humblest. Yet I tell you, Mr. Furlong, that if it should ever lie in my power I would still gladly discharge my debt of gratitude—either to him, or to his son, or to his son's son, while my life lasts. But enough; come, let me show you some of the poor things I have contrived to carry with me in my wanderings."

He rose and led the way out of the room into another across the hall in which the furniture and fittings were entirely Chinese.

Here, for nearly an hour, Richard was so fascinated that he forgot the Mandarin club and the sinister suspicion with which he had come to Abbey Road.

There were drawings of rare beauty, the colours as rich as when they were mixed a couple of centuries before; carvings so delicate that their tracery seemed to be of fine silk rather than of ivory; richly-bound books from which Dr. Wang translated quaint aphorisms; weapons and garments of a bygone age.

Oddly enough, it was while examining an illuminated volume of Confucius that Richard was recalled to himself.

Dr. Wang, as he turned the pages, recited half to himself a passage here and there, and presently came to this:

*Punishment can oppose a barrier to open crime;
laws cannot reach to secret offences.*

"That is as true to-day as when it was written!" Richard exclaimed, with such conviction that Dr. Wang glanced at him in mild surprise.

"You are right," he answered. "In the days when I administered justice I was too often confronted with that fact. But you, in this country, have progressed much. Your laws are just, both for the poor man and the rich, and there are not many offences of which your police are not aware."

"Yet it sometimes happens that the innocent suffer for the crimes of the guilty."

"That, unfortunately, will always be so. Nevertheless, there are upright men who devote themselves to the extermination of evil. I believe that you yourself are interested in society's war on the criminal," he added, smiling.

Richard determined on a bold stroke.

"Dr. Wang," he said, "you have spoken of an obligation to my family which you would be glad to discharge. May I claim payment of the debt?"

The old man turned to a great bronze Buddha that stood against the wall, and bowed before it three times, his lips moving.

"Come," he said simply, and they went back to the other room.

There he rang a bell, and the servant appeared.

"You will see that we are not disturbed," he said. "Offer refreshment to Mr. Furlong's servant, and let a man watch his car. Go."

He pointed to a chair, settled himself in another, and took a pinch of snuff.

"Speak, my friend," he said.

"Dr. Wang," Richard replied, "I am quite aware that I am taking a certain risk in——"

"Risk?" the other interrupted.

"Risk," Richard repeated, watching him narrowly.

"I fear this person's admittedly inferior understanding has become even more dulled by age——" the old man began.

"Why did you ask me to come here?" Richard broke in.

Dr. Wang regarded him with a dignified reproach that made him regret his crudity.

"I beg your pardon," he went on. "I——"

"You wish to tell me something, but you are still afraid to trust me, is not that what you would say? Listen: I swear to you by the spirits of my ancestors that what you may now tell me shall be as a secret of the Imperial Tomb between us, never to be revealed by word or deed without your consent. Will that content you?"

Richard bowed.

"I know that no more sacred oath could be taken by one of your race," he answered. "Let me be perfectly frank in return. I went to the Mandarin club the other night on false pretences. I was not an ordinary visitor; I was there to try and find out certain things."

"I trust you were successful?"

"I think so. Just how much you know of what is going on in your own club, I cannot pretend to say—whether, for instance, you know that Carson is running a gambling den in the basement."

Dr. Wang smiled.

"I know it," he admitted.

"And you know that such amusements as *fan-tan*, for example, are forbidden by law?"

"Oh, yes. But you are not going to tell me that your criminological activities include the suppression of gambling?"

Despite himself, Richard was forced to smile at the other's dry suggestion.

"No," he admitted. "Indeed, a certain discretion was a condition of my being introduced."

"Ah, yes," Wang assented. "One can always rely on Mr. Doyle's good faith. No doubt that is why he earned the reputation which I understand he enjoys in jour-

nalism. My manager, Carson, was so foolish as to imagine that your visit was in some degree of a professional nature, but I assured him that such commonplace matters were the affair of the regular police."

"You have no objection, then, to the law being broken on your premises?"

"It is written: 'There is good government when those who are near are made happy, and when those who are afar are attracted.' You were good enough when we first met to address me by a certain title. I refer to so trifling a matter only to remind you that I am not wholly unused to the administration—and even to the making—of laws. There are certain crimes which every good citizen must deplore. There are, however, other offences against the statutes of this country which are more honoured in the breach than the observance, as one of your writers has said. Need I remind you that while your laws forbid such things as lotteries, your members of Parliament, your priests—I should say, your clergy—and others who claim the veneration of the people, nevertheless purchase tickets in sweepstakes, play games of chance, and gamble in stocks and shares and commodities? Do you believe, then, that when I permit my guests to enjoy those pastimes they prefer—with the knowledge that they are conducted with scrupulous honesty—I commit too grave a crime against society?"

Richard shrugged his shoulders.

"I see your point," he said. "I am not a policeman, and I admit that a good many of our laws are regarded as out of date by the police themselves, although they cannot say so officially. But you have admitted that there are certain very real crimes that cannot be tolerated. Would you include murder among them?"

Dr. Wang's parchment-like face set in an impassive mask.

"It is written: 'Even in killing men, observe the rules

of propriety,'” he said. “I have always endeavoured to respect that precept. But I speak of other days: I was not aware that the taking of life was among the activities of my present servants.”

“I don’t mean that murder has actually been committed at your club,” Richard explained; “but I will tell you what I have found out, and you can form your own opinion.”

He described without reservation the murder of Thomas Pettigrew; his own subsequent inquiries; and the conflicting suspicions and theories they had produced.

Dr. Wang listened in silence; when Richard had finished, he took a pinch of snuff.

“You are a brave man, Mr. Furlong,” he said thoughtfully.

Richard stared.

“Knowing all these things—or believing that you know them—you come here to my house more than half-expecting to be asked to drink a cup of poisoned tea, or even to be done to death in some more painful fashion. Do you know, I wondered why you had brought a pistol in your pocket!”

“You see everything,” said Richard, and Dr. Wang waved his hand.

“Like you,” he answered, “I have trained myself to be observant. I may even claim that the habit has saved my poor life on more than one occasion. I thank you for the confidence you have shown in me; it shall not be betrayed. It is well said: ‘If a chattering bird be not placed in the mouth, vexation will not sit between the eyebrows.’ I beg that you will give me a little time to reflect on what you have told me. The persons with whom we have to do are cunning, but I think that you have placed my feet on the path that will lead to their destruction.”

"You will remember," Richard hinted, "that I shall have to call in the police eventually——"

"Do not fear for my discretion," Wang interrupted grimly. "In my country we have our own ways of obtaining information, but I promise you that all things shall be so arranged that even the tender consciences of your friends at Scotland Yard shall not be disturbed."

"Thank you," said Richard, rising. "You will let me know——?"

"I will communicate with you very soon. I had hoped to persuade you to remain and share a meal with me; but I expect Carson presently, and although he knows of your visit, it is perhaps well that he should not have reason to think it an unduly long one."

"Good-bye, then, and let me thank you——"

"Please!" Wang broke in. "I have long wished for an opportunity to repay my debt."

Richard took his leave.

Pratt, who had refused the butler's invitation to enter the house, pressed the accelerator of the car as Richard got in, but the engine did not start.

"You've forgotten to switch on the ignition, you ass," Richard remarked.

"I have not," Pratt answered coolly. "There's someone watching from the third window on the second floor. I'll pretend to see to the plugs while you peep out."

He got out, raised the bonnet and examined the engine.

Richard slued round, stooped a little, and peered.

On the second floor a curtain was moved cautiously, and Richard caught a glimpse of a face.

It was Angela Farren.

"Home, quick!" he muttered savagely as Pratt rejoined him.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Richard got back to Jermyn Street he found Doyle waiting him.

"Well," said the reporter, "I've been tapping all sorts of sources for information about old Wang."

"And I've just been to see him," Richard informed him.

"The devil you have!"

Richard explained the unexpected invitation.

"I think it was rather stout of you to go," Doyle declared. "He might have had you knocked on the head."

"That's exactly what occurred to me," Richard admitted, taking his pistol from his pocket and putting it away in a drawer, "but nothing like that happened. We had tea, and then he showed me some of his things, and we had such an interesting time that I nearly forgot what I had come for. But I took my courage in both hands and taxed him with running a gambling show, and he admitted it quite coolly."

"Did he, indeed?"

"Yes; he hinted that he knew I wouldn't give the show away."

"He's a cool hand. I've been gathering such bits of information about him as I could get hold of, but nothing very important. He was quite a big swell in China, but lately no one seems to have taken much interest in his affairs."

"Queer thing happened when I was coming away," Richard remarked. "I happened to look up, and I swear I saw Angela Farren's face at one of the windows."

Doyle started.

"Angela Farren?" he exclaimed. "Oh, come! That's a bit too steep!"

Richard nodded.

"I know it sounds like that," he agreed. "Look here, Doyle, I think I know how you feel about her, and do please understand that I hate even to hint anything unpleasant——"

"But she couldn't have been there," Doyle broke in. "She's gone away for a holiday. Sir Peter told me so himself when I 'phoned the office."

"He told me, too, and I didn't contradict him; but we've only her word for that."

Doyle grew red.

"Excuse me, Furlong," he said, "but don't you think you're going a bit too far? Ever since you found out how she tried to help Vance, you've suspected her of all sorts of things. I've seen it plainly enough. Hang it all, man, what have you got against her?"

"I suppose it's natural enough that you should be annoyed," Richard returned, "but I do think a crime expert of your experience ought to be more reasonable. If Angela Farren and Vance did not happen to be friends of yours, you wouldn't go off the deep end just because I keep an open mind about them."

"That's all very well. If you kept an open mind it would be all right with me; but if I'm prejudiced in their favour, you're even more prejudiced against them. Why on earth shouldn't the Angel go away for a rest? A shock like that was enough to upset any girl. But if she went to church you'd think she was plotting with the vicar!"

"That's a bit strong——"

"Perhaps so, and I'm sorry if I'm being offensive, but I can't help it. Even the police haven't been mad enough to suspect the Angel."

"You may be interested to know that Reed admitted to me this morning that he is having her watched."

"Then he's as big a bloody fool as——"

"As I am?"

"I didn't mean to put it that way."

"But you thought it. Well, perhaps I am. But what do you suggest she was doing at Wang's place, then?"

"I suggest that you never saw her there at all."

"You mean that for some incomprehensible reason I am telling you a lie?"

"Of course not. Sorry if you thought that. I only mean that I'm quite sure you mistook somebody else for her."

Richard rang the bell for Pratt, and gave him instructions. When the drinks arrived, he handed one to Doyle.

"Here," he said, "drink this and let's get our tempers back. We shan't get anywhere by quarrelling."

But Doyle hesitated.

"I suppose I was hasty," he admitted, "and I'm sorry; but I still think you're entirely wrong about Angela."

"That's no reason why you shouldn't have a drink, unless you think I've put poison in it."

"Cheer-ho," said Doyle, laughing, and drank. "But we must get this straight. Just what do you suspect her of?"

"I keep telling you that I don't suspect her of anything in particular. I only say that she's a remarkably clever young woman, and that I'd like to know what she's up to. You don't know, I suppose, that that Chinese boy who was in attendance on Mah Lee at the Mandarin was really Angela Farren in disguise?"

Doyle put down his glass.

"Did you say you had *tea* with Dr. Wang?" he asked ironically.

"I'm not tight—but *you* were, at the Mandarin."

"Not at first, and I'd certainly have recognised Angela."

"Have it your own way."

"Oh, don't be absurd! How on earth could she get into a place like that?"

"I don't know."

"And what could she want there?"

"Again, I don't know."

Doyle rose.

"Really, you're getting beyond me," he declared.

"Reed may be an ass—he isn't, as a matter of fact—but at least he had some show of reason for arresting Vance. But when it comes to these wild stories of Angela masquerading as a Chinese boy—well, you must excuse me if I can't swallow them. As a matter of fact, you'd done yourself pretty well at dinner——"

"And you think I was tight, too?"

"It's the only way I can explain such a mad idea."

"Well, let's say that perhaps I was wrong. We are all liable to make mistakes."

"You said you hadn't told Sir Peter?"

"No."

"Good job. He'd be furious, and probably ask you to drop the case."

"That wouldn't worry me a great deal."

"Fed up with it?"

"Not at all—but you'll forgive me if I say that both you and he don't seem to think much of the way I've handled it so far."

"Do you?" asked the reporter bluntly, and Richard laughed.

"I haven't made a howling success of it as yet," he confessed; "but what about yourself? You're a crime expert, and you told me you were glad of a chance to try and whack the police at their own game."

"So I am, but I don't pretend to be a genius, and at least I'm not so stupid as to suspect the Angel."

"Here we are back at the same old point. Can't you leave her out of it?"

"How can I? I tell you again that I believe you're barking up the wrong tree——"

"Then let me bark, for goodness' sake! I'm not asking you to bark as well."

"No, but you're asking me to help you to annoy Angela——"

"I'm not. Put it this way: I don't say that she murdered Pettigrew——"

"I should hope not!"

"—but I do say that I think she knows something about the murder that we don't know."

"Then why didn't you ask her?"

"I did, and she shut me up. In fact, she told me I was about the biggest fool she'd ever met."

"Well——"

"You don't blame her? Perhaps not, but you'll understand that it didn't encourage me to regard her as a sister. Let's drop the subject. I quite understand how beastly it must be for you."

Doyle glared at him.

"Are you suggesting that I'm in love with her?" he asked.

"I'm not suggesting anything—though I don't see why you should be so terribly offended if I were. She's a very charming girl."

"And yet you suspect her of being mixed up in this ghastly affair."

"You make me tired! How often have you seen perfectly innocent people dragged into crimes they had nothing to do with?"

"That's true enough."

"Of course it is. Look here, if you feel you'd rather

not work with me any longer, just say so. I'll understand."

Doyle shook his head.

"I don't want to be unreasonable," he answered, "and I don't want to chuck it. If you'll assure me that you don't think Angela is anything more than accidentally mixed up in this, I'll trust to time to clear it up."

"I don't think Angela Farren murdered Pettigrew; I don't think she knew he was going to be murdered; but I think she's got herself into a damned awkward mess, and I wouldn't be sorry to help her out of it. Will that do?"

"O.K. We'll leave it at that. What are you going to do next?"

"I'm a bit stumped, to be honest. I seem to keep on running up against brick walls. I think I'll go round to the Mandarin to-night. That can't do any harm, if it doesn't do any good."

"Want me?"

"I think not. Look in on your own, latish, if you like; but it will be better if we don't seem to be always together."

"Quite right. See you later, then," and he went.

Richard, glad that the reporter had not thrown in his hand in disgust, dressed and dined at his club. He arrived at the Mandarin about eleven o'clock and Carson, who was in the hall, hurried to meet him.

"I'm so glad you've come," he cried effusively. "I can't tell you how sorry I am about that disgraceful row. It's the first time anything like that has happened here. Of course I've had those four men struck off the membership list. They should never have been allowed in. It was my late assistant who accepted them while I was away for a few days."

"Don't bother about it," Richard responded. "It was rather amusing, and there's no harm done."

"Sporting of you to be so nice about it. I was afraid we shouldn't see you here again, and I was going to write and apologise."

"That's all right. I like the place; it's really very jolly. By the way, perhaps I ought to apologise to you."

"What for?"

"Persuading Doyle to take me downstairs without your leave. I'm afraid he was a bit tight."

"That's quite all right. Doyle wasn't too tight not to know that you're not the sort to give us away. Our show may not be quite legal, but it's straight—not like those places where the croupiers are crooks and the players are simply robbed right and left. I wouldn't stand for that. But do let me offer you a drink——"

Richard accepted the drink with private reluctance, and then went upstairs in time to see Mah Lee finish her turn.

Then he danced with her, and she whispered that she wanted to talk to him.

They found a quiet table and sat down.

"So you have come back?" she said.

"How could I help it?"

She made a gesture of impatience.

"I have told you not to flatter me," she protested.

"But I like to keep in practice."

"You are too absurd! And yet it is a pity that we are not in love."

"Why?"

"Because I think you would make love very nicely."

"That's very charming of you. I think you would be perfectly marvellous."

"I could be, but I do not love you."

"I hate to admit it, but——"

"You do not love me, either? That is all the better, because now we can be friends. What have you been doing?"

"I called on another friend of yours to-day."

"Who?"

"Dr. Wang."

She stared in surprise.

"Why?"

"Because he invited me."

"And you were not afraid to go?"

"Oh, yes, I was; scared stiff."

"What happened?"

"We had tea, and a most delightful chat."

"That was all?"

"Yes; he didn't even hand me a bowstring, or invite me to test the edge of a poisoned dagger."

"Now you are being ridiculous! What did he want?"

"Apparently, like you, he appreciates the charm of my society."

She pondered.

"I don't understand," she murmured, half to herself.

"Wang is a strange man. Sometimes he frightens me, and yet I think he could be a good friend. . . ."

She broke off as the lights went out. The band stopped playing, there was a confusion of exclamations and laughter as the dancers bumped into each other; then Carson's voice was heard above the clamour.

"It's all right, ladies and gentlemen," he cried. "Just a fuse gone, I expect. We'll have lights in a moment."

Servants hurried in, carrying lighted candles, and some lanterns which had been used for a Chinese carnival.

"Very annoying," said the manager, stopping at Richard's table. "Can't find any fuse blown. However, I've sent for some electrician fellows from the electric light works, and I expect they'll soon put things right."

He hurried on, and Richard turned to Mah Lee.

"Tell me," he said, "when I got that knock on the head, was it you who got me out of the place?"

"I helped," she answered casually. "One could not call the police, you see. . . . I am sorry you were hurt."

"That's nothing. But I rather think that attendant of yours helped, too—a girl, isn't she?"

"Yes; a friend of mine who sometimes helps in my shows."

"Her face seemed oddly familiar."

"Why do you pretend? She told me she was sure you had recognised her."

"It was Angela Farren, then?"

"So you *did* know her!"

"What was she doing here?"

"She was helping in my act——"

"Miss Farren is a beautiful girl and a highly efficient secretary," he interrupted; "but if she works all day in an office and half the night in a cabaret, it is not surprising that she has to go into the country for a rest now and then."

"You do not understand. . . . She was . . . she is . . . she wanted . . . Oh, it is all so difficult! But you will understand presently."

"Why not now?"

"Because I dare not tell you until I am *sure*! But look—they have placed lights so that the band can see the music. Dance with me, please. I do not want Carson to think that we are talking too much——"

They began to waltz. As they passed the main door a little group came in—Carson, a typical electrician, and the electrician's mate, who carried a bag of tools.

The three men went to a corner, where Carson indicated a fuse-box.

Richard, on the next turn, passed as close as possible to the group, and stared hard at the electrician's mate as that worthy lifted a handlamp. The man's left eyelid quivered almost imperceptibly, and Richard recognised

in the overall-clad figure no less a person than Sergeant Reed, of Scotland Yard.

When they regained their table, Mah Lee looked at Richard. "Tell me," she said, "did you tell Mr. Doyle about Angela? You did? What did he say?"

"He nearly knocked me down."

"He is in love with her, you know—but it is no good."

"Vance?"

"Yes. So he did not believe you?"

"He said I was drunk."

"Good."

"Why?"

"She did not want them to suspect at the office."

"But why all this mystery? I'm only trying to find out the truth."

"So am I. So is she. Hush——"

She pointed. Doyle loomed out of the semi-obscurity.

"Hullo, people," he said. "What's this—a wake?"

"Lights failed," Richard explained. "Electrician blokes on the job."

"I see. Mah Lee, you are as beautiful as ever. Going to dance with me?"

They moved off.

Meanwhile the electrician's mate approached slowly, apparently following the lead of the wires on the wall. At Richard's table he stooped and examined the skirting.

"What are you doing here?" whispered Richard.

"Just looking round," whispered the electrician's mate; "what are *you* doing?"

"Just looking round," smiled Richard.

"Well, don't get another tap on the head," smiled the electrician's mate, and passed on.

"Blast that man!" said the discomfited Richard, under his breath. "I'll probably find him up the chimney when I get home!"

CHAPTER XVII

RICHARD had no further opportunity of talking alone with Mah Lee, and he and Doyle left the club soon afterwards—by the orthodox exit this time, as the reporter remarked with a grin.

Refusing the commissionaire's suggestion of a taxi, they strolled westward.

"How did you get on with Carson?" Doyle inquired.

"Very well. He was very apologetic and all that, but I assured him that it was quite unnecessary. Then he bought me a drink, and we metaphorically wept on each other's shoulders in innocent joy."

"How absurd you are!" said Doyle, smiling. "But I'm glad you fixed things up."

"Quite. By the bye, he was quite nice about my having persuaded you to take me down to the gambling room."

"Persuaded! That's funny!"

"I thought that was the best way to put it. I excused you by saying you were tight, but he said you were never too tight to be discreet, or words to that effect."

"Oily merchant," Doyle commented.

"It takes all sorts to make a world," Richard remarked.

"Confucius?" the reporter inquired politely.

"Go to blazes!" Richard retorted, laughing.

They walked on in silence. There had been a growing mist during the evening, and experienced night watchmen, gazing meditatively into their bucket-fires of glowing coke, opined that there was a fog coming, an' a real good 'un at that; never mind wot the weather forecast said; seven an' a 'arf years of rheumatics in the j'int

was worth all the weather forecasts wol was ever forecasted.

"Struck any new ideas?" Doyle asked presently.

"Yes and no," Richard answered. "I've been turning things over in my mind a bit. Do you know, I wonder if we haven't been rather forgetting one possible angle of the affair."

"What's that?"

"The murder of that man—what was his name?—Ledoux, the assistant manager of the Mandarin."

"Ledoux? I don't quite see how he comes into it."

"I'm not sure that I do myself. Still, he was one of the push, so to speak, and must have known about the gambling. In fact, Carson said it was he who allowed those four toughs in."

"Oh, he knew that all right. But I don't see the connection with Pettigrew's death."

"I don't myself. I'm just trying to find any new line that might be worth while. I've a good mind to go round to the rooms he used to occupy, and have another look round. I was there with Reed, you remember."

"Don't think I'm suggesting that you might not pick up some hint that Reed missed; you certainly did in the case of the Angel; but I can't help thinking you'd be wasting your time. Reed didn't suggest that Ledoux was mixed up in the Pettigrew affair, did he?"

"Oh, no. Never mentioned such an idea. He seemed to think it was an ordinary *crime passionel*. You know how many of them there are."

"Quite. Then why——?"

"I suppose it sounds rather ridiculous, but it's just a matter of trying every possible line of country."

"I see. But I should be a bit cautious. You don't want to get people talking more than you can help, and there's a good deal of gossip in these quiet streets."

"I know. I'll tell the good lady that owns the house

that I've some idea of engaging the rooms for a friend, and then I'll slip in to-morrow evening and see if there's still anything to be seen."

"Well, I think it's a waste of time," Doyle declared frankly. "Still, it can't do any harm, if it doesn't do any good."

"Exactly. Are you coming along to my place for a drink?"

"Not to-night, thanks. Look here, will you be offended if I give you a hint?"

"Of course not. Very glad of it."

"Then keep your eyes open when you're out late at night. Stick to taxis instead of walking."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Just this: those four bright specimens are not likely to be highly pleased at being turfed out of the Mandarin. I know their type. They are quite capable of hiring a few roughs to catch you alone and manhandle you. I don't say they'd murder you—only kick in a few ribs and smash your jaw, and so on."

"Nice fellows! Thanks for the tip."

"I don't know those particular men, but I fancy one of them has to do with one of the big racecourse gangs. They're pretty tough customers, you know."

"Yes. I've heard of their gentle ways."

"It's worth bearing in mind. Of course, they may think it wiser to let you alone, but it's just as well to be on your guard. Now I'll be getting home, I think. Here's a taxi; can I drop you in Jermyn Street?"

The next morning Richard sent Pratt round to Doughty Street.

In due course the ex-soldier returned and reported that the late Mr. Ledoux's rooms were still untenanted.

Meanwhile Richard had visited Scotland Yard and seen Sergeant Reed.

"Given up the electrical business, then?" he remarked.

"Yes; it was just a temporary job," grinned the detective.

"Pity. I'd almost hoped you were taking to honest work," Richard retorted. "Well, and how goes the Pettigrew affair?"

"I was just going to ask you the same thing, Mr. Furlong."

"Heavens! The expert condescending to question the amateur!"

"You know how highly we value your opinion, sir," said the detective suavely, and Richard laughed.

"If anything ever happens to the Sphinx," he said, "I'll recommend the Egyptian Government to put you in its place. Vance all right?"

"A bit fretful."

"Hardly surprising. When are you going to make up your mind about him?"

Sergeant Reed sharpened a pencil with some care.

"Perhaps I've made up my mind about him already," he answered thoughtfully, and Richard pricked up his ears.

"Guilty, or Not Guilty?" he asked.

"Really, Mr. Furlong, that's a question for a jury, not for a subordinate police officer," the detective murmured in affected horror.

Richard laughed and changed the subject.

"By the way," he said carelessly as he rose to go, "did you ever find out who murdered that man Ledoux?"

Reed's eyes half-closed.

"Ledoux? Let me see, which case was that?" he reflected. "Oh, I remember. The Mandarin club official, wasn't it?"

"I thought you might remember," said Richard dryly.

"Yes. Ledoux, of course. No, I don't think the officer in charge of the case has made any arrest yet."

Richard sneaked a cigarette from a box on the table and lit it.

"Sergeant Reed," he said deliberately, "I warn you that one of these days I shall be goaded into murdering a certain officer of the Metropolitan police. And when the judge and jury have accepted my plea of Justifiable Homicide, I shall see that your widow is suitably provided for!"

The detective chuckled.

"So it has occurred to you to turn your attention to Ledoux, has it?" he asked. "I'm surprised you didn't think of it before."

"What do you mean?" asked Richard sharply.

"You are so interested in crime," smiled the other. "But I suppose the Pettigrew case has taken all your time?"

Richard permitted himself to become profane.

"If I knew exactly how one gnashes one's teeth, I would gnash them at you!" he declared.

"Well, well, I'll return good for evil and give you a useful hint."

"That's very charming of you. And what is this gem of wisdom?"

"When you go out at night, keep away from dark streets."

Richard's smile vanished.

"Why?" he demanded.

"The newspapers will tell you that the inefficient police cannot even make the streets of this great city safe," Reed returned, with rather a bitter smile.

Richard ignored the pleasantry.

"I was given the same advice last night," he remarked thoughtfully.

"Indeed? Who gave it you, if I may ask?"

"Doyle, of the *Courier*."

The detective nodded.

"Mr. Doyle is a very shrewd man," he replied gravely. "I'm not going to ask you what made him say that to you. No doubt he had his own reasons. But if I were you, I should follow his advice."

"You're not fat enough, Reed," said Richard.

"Fat enough, sir?" The detective was plainly bewildered. "It doesn't do to be fat in our job. Besides, I don't——"

"You must brush up your reading," Richard interrupted benevolently. "Remember your *Pickwick Papers*; it was the Fat Boy who tried to make people's flesh creep, you know."

"I remember," the detective admitted, grinning. "But I wasn't joking. I give you the tip for what it's worth."

"Thanks," Richard answered. "I appreciate your tender care for my safety, and I'll shove a pair of knuckle-dusters in my pocket when I go to the theatre in future."

He went out laughing, but the detective's warning had impressed him more than he had cared to admit—coming, as it did, after Doyle's admonition.

Both these men, he was well aware, knew more than he did of the world of crime, and their opinions were not to be lightly disregarded.

He lunched at his club, and spent an hour or so afterwards in reviewing once more the mass of conflicting theories, facts and fancies that had grown up round the killing of Pettigrew.

Late in the afternoon he left the club.

The fog had thickened a good deal, and taxicabs were crawling with such caution that he made his way to the underground railway and took a train to Russell Square station.

From there he walked to Doughty Street.

The proprietress of the house received him effusively. She remembered him as the gentleman who came with

the other gentleman about that there poor Mr. Ledoux—and how she ever got over the shock that gave her she never knew (and she with palpitations if she so much as hurried up one flight)—but there, a living wasn't easy to get and it had to be got if one wasn't going to lay down and die in the gutter, and what could you expect?

Richard, seizing the opportunity, explained that what *he* expected was that the rooms once occupied by Mr. Ledoux were still vacant.

Vacant? Why, bless your heart, people was so unreasonable that them that heard of the tragedy wouldn't take 'em on no account—not even if they was to be cleaned and done up all fresh, even to the extent of new paper and whitewashing the ceilings—and a pretty penny *that* costs nowadays, as any reasonable person would grant.

Richard, assuming himself regarded as a reasonable person, granted it readily, privately relieved to find that the rooms were still as he had last seen them.

He recounted his fiction of an impending visit from a provincial friend, for whom he thought the rooms might do, and hinted that there would be no need to make the new tenant acquainted with their tragic history.

The landlady, enchanted, proclaimed aloud Richard's virtues as they went upstairs.

It was covenanted between them that, as Richard was still a little uncertain as to his friend's movements, he should have an option on the rooms for one week, on payment of a modest sum.

It was further agreed that, in the event of the transaction being completed, the new tenant should be permitted to make reasonable alterations—chiefly in the matter of bookshelves, he being engaged in literary pursuits.

To this end Richard proposed to make certain measurements with a folding rule which he produced

from his pocket, and the good lady left him to his job, and descended to the basement, debating the respective merits of sausages or a nice bit of tripe—with a cup o' tea and a drop o' something short afterwards—as a tasty supper to celebrate her good fortune.

Left alone, Richard proceeded to go over the apartments with the meticulous care he had so often seen professional detectives employ—but when he had finished his task he had to admit that he was no wiser than before. Not a finger-print, not a scratch on the paint, not a used match or torn-off button rewarded him.

He lit a cigarette, went downstairs and let himself out.

As he stepped into the street it occurred to him that the fog, which was growing steadily worse, would provide an admirable cloak for any such attack as had been so agreeably suggested both by Doyle and Reed.

He began to walk towards the station, keeping well out to the kerb, until a narrow escape from a motor-van, the driver of which miscalculated his distance and mounted the pavement, made him edge in to the houses again.

He had just turned a corner when he heard a slight sound behind him. He turned quickly as a burly form loomed out of the fog, and threw up his arm in instinctive defence.

Something flashed in the air and he felt a sharp pain in his left arm.

With the readiness that comes to anyone who has learned anything of boxing, he countered almost automatically with his right. The blow was not a hard one, but it disconcerted his assailant, and Richard closed with him.

They struggled for a few moments, then the other man tore himself free and made off, leaving Richard too shaken to follow.

Presently he picked himself up. His coat sleeve was soaked with blood, but as far as he could see the cut was not serious, and he bound it up as well as he could with his handkerchief, using his right hand and his teeth to tie the knot.

He had been unable to see the face of his assailant, for the man had pulled his hat over his eyes and wore a muffler over the lower part of his face, but as Richard leaned against the wall of a house to recover his breath, his feet struck against something and he stooped and picked it up. He took it to the next street lamp and examined it.

It was a knife—or rather, a dagger—and on the hilt were engraved a dragon and some Chinese inscription.

Richard remembered that the man had hesitated, apparently looking for something, and then thought better of it and fled.

Richard's face grew very grim as he slipped the knife into his pocket.

A few yards further along the street he met a crawling taxi. The driver was on his way home, having abandoned the effort to negotiate the fogbound traffic, but on hearing Richard's account of an accident in which he had been knocked down and cut by the headlight of a car that did not wait to help him, the man sportingly offered to take him home.

At Jermyn Street he was able to examine his wound, which proved to be of little importance. Pratt dressed and bound it up, and then Richard sent him to the telephone.

"Ring up Scotland Yard," he said, "and ask whether Sergeant Reed is still there. If he is, say that I should be very glad if he would come and have a quiet dinner here with me. Say I've a little story to tell him."

Pratt executed his orders and returned.

"Mr. Reed's compliments, sir," he said. "He says

he'll be very pleased to come to dinner, and he's very glad you're not much hurt."

"You fool!" cried Richard. "Why did you tell him I was hurt at all?"

"I didn't, sir," Pratt replied, and departed to command the dinner from the service kitchen.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was not until dinner was over, and Richard had installed his guest in a comfortable chair and provided him with coffee, brandy and a cigar, that he consented to talk shop.

"Now, Reed, old son," he said, "I want you to tell me something."

"With pleasure, if I can, sir," the sergeant replied.

"How the devil did you know I'd been hurt?"

Reed smiled, and regarded his cigar with appreciation. He belonged to the new order of policemen—keen, alert, with good manners and a quiet taste in dress, and it was not the first time that he had been Richard's guest—a recognition that he valued highly.

"It wasn't very difficult to guess it," he replied. "You wanted to see me urgently; that meant that something had happened. But you told Pratt to telephone me, instead of talking to me yourself; that meant that for some reason you were not feeling very well. But you very kindly asked me to dinner; that meant that you were not very bad, and expected to be better presently. So I made a shot at it, that's all."

"You old fraud!" Richard answered, laughing. "You don't deserve to be told, but I'll tell you all the same."

As briefly as possible he described his adventure, and Reed listened with close attention.

"You couldn't recognise the man?" the detective asked, when he had finished.

"Afraid not. It was too foggy, and he was too much muffled up."

"Biggish fellow, you said? That sounds like Carson."

"Just what I thought."

"May I see the knife?"

Richard handed it to him.

"You needn't be afraid to handle it," he remarked; "the man had gloves on."

"He would," Reed muttered. "Do you know what this Chinese inscription means? But I suppose you haven't had time——"

"I have, as it happens. I sent Pratt with it to a man I know who understands Chinese, and asked for a translation. Of course I said it was just a knife I had picked up—which was literally true—and was interested in."

"What did your friend say?"

"He said it was an ordinary specimen, enough. The inscription is only the maker's name, and a sort of trade-mark. It was made in Canton, it seems."

"Canton, eh? Your friend Dr. Wang lived somewhere round there once, didn't he?"

"I believe so, but I don't think Wang had anything to do with this."

"Why not?"

"Because I am on rather good terms with him. The fact is, my father did him a good turn once, and he is grateful—or says he is. I have told him what I am after, and he has promised to help me."

Reed raised his eyebrows.

"You think that was wise?" he inquired.

"I don't know," Richard admitted. "I did it on the spur of the moment. Afterwards I began to wonder whether I ought to have put my cards on the table like that."

"It was certainly taking a risk. These Chinese people are queer devils. Would you care to tell me whether you had any special reason for regretting having told Wang your ideas?"

Richard hesitated.

"The fact is," he answered, "I got a bit of a shock when I was leaving Wang's house. I saw that girl Angela Farren watching me from a window."

"Didn't you know she was there?"

"No. Did you?"

"Yes. She went straight there after she had given you the slip at Victoria station."

"Blast!" Richard muttered. "You knew about that, too, did you?"

"Well, I thought I told you we'd been keeping an eye on her."

"Look here, Reed, what *is* that girl up to?"

Reed shook his head.

"Difficult to say," he answered. "She may be anything from a crook to the 'angel' they call her in the *Courier* office."

"You suspect her——?"

"I suspect her of being darn clever—and a clever woman is capable of a lot of things, especially when she's in love. By the way, we released young Vance this afternoon."

"What?" cried Richard in surprise. "You might have told me."

"The responsible authorities, as the newspapers say, only decided it a short time before I left."

"Why did they do it?"

"Lack of evidence."

"Naturally—but as far as evidence goes, you might have done it days ago."

"That's right, but there were reasons."

"Don't tell me anything you don't want to," said Richard dryly, and the detective grinned.

"It's only when a man has been tried for a crime and acquitted that you can't re-arrest him," he said. "Vance may be more useful to us outside a cell than in one, and you may be sure we shan't let him out of our sight."

"Rather a cat-and-mouse business," Richard remarked with distaste.

"It is," the detective agreed, "but that can't be helped. I'm human, too, Mr. Furlong, but it's our job to find out who killed Pettigrew, and if one way doesn't answer, we must try another."

"How can Vance help you—and why should he, if it comes to that?"

"He may do it without knowing it. He's in love with Angela Farren, remember."

"And she's in love with him."

"Well?"

"Well, she wants to clear him of suspicion. Between the two of them we may pick up something useful."

Richard shook his head.

"What I admire about you," he said, "is your capacity for telling lies without ever departing from the truth!"

"That's pretty strong!" Reed protested, laughing.

"What I mean is, you're hedging. Do you honestly believe Vance killed Pettigrew, or don't you?"

"Personally, I don't."

"Then who did?"

"If I could tell you that, sir, I'd be knocking at Mr. Dale's door and asking about the next vacancy for an inspectorship. But seriously, Mr. Furlong, what do *you* think about that girl?"

"Dashed if I know what to think! At first I believed she was only trying to shield Vance. Then I got a shock when I saw her at the Mandarin Club, and a worse one

when I saw her in Wang's house. By the way, what were you doing at the club, dressed up as a mechanic, and how did you know the lights were going to fail so opportunely?"

"I got the electric light company to turn them off at the main," Reed explained, grinning. "I'm glad to say that people like that are always ready to oblige us."

"And very nice of them! You spotted the gambling place, I suppose—or did the excellent Carson keep you away from the basement?"

"Oh, I knew about that already. We'll shut that up one of these days, of course, but just at the moment we don't want to complicate the Pettigrew affair. As it was, I contrived to get into Carson's private office and have a look round."

"Find anything?"

"Oh, nothing much," the detective answered non-committally. "It was just a spec—you never know what may turn up in a case like this."

Richard saw that he was not to be drawn.

"You absolutely loathe giving anything away until you're perfectly sure of it, don't you?" he retorted.

"Well," Reed answered reasonably, "what's the good of talking a lot of stuff that you may only have to take back afterwards? If it comes to that, Mr. Furlong, you've got a card or two up your own sleeve, I think."

"Perhaps——" Richard begun, when he was interrupted by the entrance of Pratt, who handed him a card. He glanced at it and made a noise.

"Vance is here!" he said.

"I think I'd better clear out, sir," said Reed, half-rising; "he won't want to see me."

"Sit down," Richard ordered, pushing the detective back into his chair. "I don't know of any reason why Mr. Terry Vance should choose my friends for me. If

he doesn't like your being here, he can just go away again. Pratt, show Mr. Vance in."

Mr. Vance came in with a characteristic rush, and stopped dead at the sight of the Sergeant.

"How do you do?" Richard greeted him pleasantly. "You know my *friend*, Mr. Reed, already," and the detective flushed with pleasure at the hint.

Vance nodded stiffly.

"I had hoped you could spare me a few minutes," he said.

"Why not? Sit down and have a drink. Pratt——"

Vance accepted a whisky and soda, evidently not seeing how he could very well refuse it.

"What was it you wanted to see me about?" Richard asked.

Vance shot a hostile glance at the detective.

"My business is private," he declared.

"Look here, Vance," said Richard, "forgive me if I ask you not to be a bloody fool. Sergeant Reed arrested you, as he's arrested lots of better men in his time. If you hadn't been an ass—I mean, if you'd spoken out plainly at the beginning—you'd have saved yourself a lot of trouble. Now you're free again, and you ought to be thankful. Hang it all, man, you can't blame him for doing his job. Tell us what we can do for you, and cut out the heavy manner, for goodness' sake! He's just as ready to help you as I am, if it's possible, aren't you, Reed?"

"Of course," the Sergeant agreed.

Vance gulped a drink.

"Sorry," he muttered. "I'm a bit upset. I've telephoned to the office and—and——"

"And found that Miss Farren has gone away?"

"Yes."

"And why shouldn't *she*? She was upset, too, and needed a change."

"But she wouldn't—I never thought she'd——"

"You mean," Richard interrupted with calm cruelty, "that you didn't think she'd buzz off to enjoy herself while you languished in a dungeon."

Vance flushed.

"Very funny!" he retorted angrily. "I didn't think anything of the sort! I thought——"

He stopped abruptly, and the detective cut in quickly:

"Mr. Vance is wondering why Miss Farren seems to have given up the remarkable efforts she was making to prove his innocence."

"What do you mean by that?" Vance demanded.

"Just what I say. But you needn't worry. Miss Farren is sticking to the job——"

"And really going to a lot of trouble," Richard put in, "and to some queer places, too."

"What places?" Vance asked uneasily.

"Oh, night clubs and so on—the Mandarin, for instance. Do you know it?"

Vance turned white.

"Don't be absurd!" he muttered. "Angela doesn't know anything about such places."

"Really? Ask Mah Lee and Mr. Carson, if you don't believe me."

"Carson?" Vance sprang up in a fury. "What's that swine got to do with it? Damn you both, what are you suggesting? If you think I'm going to stand here and let you insult——"

"Steady on!" Richard broke in. "You can stand up or sit down, as you like, but there's no need to shout. Let me remind you that I didn't invite you to visit me. If you want us to help you, the least you can do is to be civil. You seem to be very anxious to defend Miss Farren before we've even said that we suspected her."

Vance mastered his anger with an effort. He was not

a fool, and he saw the position into which his heat had betrayed him.

"I'm not trying to defend her," he answered, "because there's no need. She hasn't done anything, except to try and help me."

"Then what have you come here for?"

"I was worried because—because I thought she might be ill, and I hoped you'd be able to tell me where to find her."

"Why not ask Sir Peter?"

"I did. He said she was knocking about the country in a car."

"He told me the same thing."

"And you don't know where?"

"I? My dear fellow, Miss Farren doesn't confide in me. In fact, she blames my meddling for your arrest."

Vance glowered at the two men. He felt that he was on thin ice, but for the life of him he could not determine to what extent they were playing with him. It flashed on him that they were fishing to find out what he knew, and he grew suddenly cautious.

"I understand," he said, with a change of manner too sudden to be convincing. "Sorry. I thought for the moment that you— Well, anyhow, that's that. I expect I'll hear from her soon."

"No doubt," Richard agreed smoothly. "Meanwhile, I suppose you'll return to your job at the *Courier* office?"

Vance hesitated.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "Sir Peter wants me to, but it's not very pleasant when one has been suspected of murder . . . there are probably some people who believe it . . ."

"Nonsense, Mr. Vance!" said Reed. "Don't let that get you down. Your friends will believe in you, and you can let the others go to blazes."

Vance nodded, somewhat cheered.

"I suppose so," he admitted.

Richard was about to speak, when again Pratt interrupted.

"Mr. Doyle, sir," he announced.

"Splendid! Bring him in," said Richard. "We've got a surprise for you, Doyle," he added as the reporter entered, and stopped in astonishment at the sight of his colleague.

"Well, look who's here!" cried Doyle, shaking Vance's hand.

"They released me to-day," the younger man explained.

"That's great! What's the idea, Reed?"

"Another Scotland Yard blunder," the detective answered dryly, and even Vance laughed.

"Well, what about making whoopee to celebrate?" Doyle went on. "Let's all go and have supper somewhere."

"Thanks, I'm afraid I'm not in the mood for that sort of thing," Vance answered stiffly.

Doyle stared.

"The fact is," Reed explained, "I'm afraid that Mr. Vance rather resented something we said about Miss Farren——"

"You've been talking about Angela?" Doyle interrupted, his face clouding. "But Furlong told me that was all settled——"

"Settled?" cried Vance. "What are you talking about? There's something behind all this. Why the hell can't you speak out, all of you?"

"It's all right, Vance," Doyle began hurriedly, but the other would not listen.

"It's not all right!" he cried furiously. "So you're in the game too, are you? Do you think I don't know you've been trying to make love to Angela for years? I suppose you've been at it again while I was in that

damned cell, and she turned you down? So that's why you've been trying to make out that she——"

Doyle's hands clenched.

"Stop that, Vance!" he snarled. "How dare you talk to me like that, you lousy young swine? Angela's a million times too good for a prig like you."

Vance's fist caught him on the chin before the others could interfere, and he went down with a crash. He scrambled up, a fleck of white foam on his lips, and hurled himself at Vance. Reed sprang up, Richard yelled for Pratt, and it was all that the three of them could do to drag the struggling couple apart.

At last they got them back to something like sanity, and Richard sent Pratt out of the room.

"Well, you're a pretty pair, I must say," he remarked.

Doyle, panting heavily, buried his face in his hand.

"For Heaven's sake shut up, and give me a drink," he muttered, and Reed watched him curiously as Richard handed him a stiff whisky.

Vance went to the glass, re-buttoned his collar and smoothed his hair with shaking hands.

"I'm sorry this happened," he said, "but I stick to what I said, and I don't want to have anything more to do with any of you."

"Here, wait a minute!" Richard expostulated, but Vance strode out of the room, got his hat from Pratt, and left the flat.

Doyle stood up rather unsteadily.

"May I go into the bathroom and have a wash?" he asked.

He left the room, and Richard turned to Reed, but the detective held up his hand warningly.

"A pity, all that," he said carelessly, "but it always happens sooner or later when two men are after the same girl. They'll get over it. A storm very often clears the air, you know."

"Have a drink," said Richard.

"Thanks, I will."

They were chatting easily when Doyle returned.

He had recovered himself, and was volubly eager to apologise for his share in the affair.

"I'm terribly sorry!" he said. "I'm afraid I lost my temper. I ought to have remembered that Vance must be feeling pretty rotten. I'd no idea——"

"Forget it," Richard interrupted. "He'll come to his senses presently. You weren't frightfully tactful, as a matter of fact, but we all make mistakes sometimes. Have another drink—or finish that one; you've hardly touched it."

"Thanks. But I say, what's the matter?" for Richard's face had shown a twinge of pain as he forgot his wound and moved his arm too suddenly.

"Oh, nothing much. A bloke gave me a jab with a knife, that's all."

"What on earth——?"

Richard told his story, and Doyle sprang up and strode about, greatly excited.

"I say, this is pretty damnable!" he cried. "I told you to look out, you know. I felt sure those cursed toughs would make trouble. Reed, what are you going to do about it?"

"I'll do all I can," the detective assured him. "Unfortunately, Mr. Furlong doesn't think he'd know the man again if he saw him. However, we'll have to do our best to find him."

"So I should hope! This is getting a bit too thick! I only wish I'd been with you, Furlong."

"I can't expect you to act as a permanent bodyguard," said Richard. "Anyhow, I'll take jolly good care how I wander about in fogs for the future."

"Yes, do. But I haven't explained why I called in.

I wanted to know if you'd found any clue up at Ledoux's place."

"Afraid not. It was rather a forlorn hope at the best, you know."

Doyle showed his disappointment.

"I know it was," he agreed, "but I've got to the stage of snatching at any straw. I owe you an apology, Reed."

"How is that?"

"Well, as I told Furlong, I used to think I'd like to tackle a real good murder—not from the reporter's point of view, if you see what I mean—and show you Scotland Yard experts how to do it. So far, I'm afraid I've failed dismally."

"Not discouraged, are you?"

"Afraid I am, a bit. We don't seem to get any forrader, whatever we do."

"Oh, well," said the detective philosophically, "there are always some crimes that nobody can solve. We must just hope for the best."

"That's where you've got the pull over me—you're so darn patient," Doyle remarked ruefully, and presently said good-night and departed, arranging to meet Richard at the *Courier* office the next day.

"Temperamental bloke, that," Richard remarked. "Always either full of enthusiasm or down in the dumps."

Reed nodded thoughtfully.

"I think," he said, "I should like to go into the bathroom, if you will show me where it is."

Richard stared at his tone, then led the way out of the room.

In the bathroom Reed got down on his hands and knees and proceeded to examine the floor, paying especial attention to the corners.

Presently he rose, and looked about him with a frown.

Then his eye fell on a nickel-plated ashtray fixed to the wall near the bath. He lifted the tray carefully from its holder, spread his handkerchief on a small table, and turned the tray upside down on it.

Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he pounced on a small object, examined it, and handed it to Richard.

It was a tiny piece of tissue paper screwed up into a ball.

"My hat!" said Richard.

"Temperamental bloke, you called him, didn't you?" smiled Reed. "It does make them that, doesn't it?"

"I'm sorry for him," said Richard.

"Lucky thing for the girl she chose the other one," Reed remarked. "You can never cure this kind."

CHAPTER XIX

A NIGHT spent chiefly in tossing and turning and muttering anathema on things in general did not improve Terry Vance's peace of mind. Towards morning, however, he slept heavily, and it was late when he awoke.

He dawdled over a breakfast for which he had no appetite, and then nerved himself to go to the *Courier* office.

There he received congratulations to which he listened with ill-concealed impatience, for he had worried himself to the point of doubting—quite unjustly—their sincerity.

He saw Doyle in the offing, and flushed, but the crime reporter had the tact to pretend not to have seen him.

At last Sir Peter arrived, and sent for him at once.

"Well, my boy, it's splendid to see you back again," the big man said heartily.

"Thanks, sir," Vance responded glumly.

"Come, come," Sir Peter went on, "you mustn't take things so badly. Those fools at Scotland Yard have found out their mistake, and——"

"And everybody will say, 'He probably did it all the same, only they couldn't prove it!'" Vance broke in bitterly.

Sir Peter coughed.

No one knew better than he how much truth there was in the young fellow's words. The law holds a man innocent until he is proved guilty, but public opinion finds a gloomy relish in nodding wisely and believing the worst.

"Face it out, my boy," Sir Peter counselled. "You've nothing to be ashamed of. Look here, clear out and have a damn good holiday somewhere. Do yourself well, and send the bill to me."

"It's good of you, Sir Peter, but I'm not going to run away," Vance replied with a sudden flash of determination that surprised himself. "I've got to live it down, and I may as well begin now."

"That's the spirit! I think you're right, Vance. And don't forget that we're going to get to the bottom of this business if I have to employ every detective in Europe."

"I hope you'll find better ones than the present gang," the young man burst out.

Sir Peter pierced a cigar and lit it before he replied.

"I'm a bit disappointed myself," he confessed, "but I must be fair to Furlong. You can't expect him to do miracles. After all, the police haven't done anything, either."

"Except arrest me."

"Yes—the fools! But Furlong and Doyle, with you to help them now you're free——"

"Excuse me, Sir Peter, I'm afraid I can't agree to be mixed up with them in any way."

"What's the matter with you? They've done everything they can for you."

"So they say."

"Look here, what are you driving at?"

Vance sneered openly.

"The police may have been fools enough to arrest me," he answered, "but at least they weren't such fools as to suspect the An—Miss Farren."

Sir Peter's brows knit.

"Suspect Angela Farren?" he roared. "What the deuce do you mean? Why should they arrest her?"

"Ask the brilliant Mr. Furlong."

Sir Peter's fist came down with a crash on the table.

"This has gone far enough!" he declared. "I want to make every allowance for your—your——"

"My utter fatheadedness!" Vance broke in, reckless of his chief's anger. "All right! Just ask Furlong, that's all! As for Doyle, I knocked him down last night, so no doubt he'll be glad to tell you what he thinks of me."

Sir Peter was hot-tempered, but he had not built up a great organisation without learning to handle men. He saw that Vance was on the verge of a breakdown, and he changed his tone.

"There's something here I don't understand," he said quietly. "No one has said anything to me about Angela Farren. What is it they suspect her of?"

"I don't know. I went to see Furlong last night. Reed was there, and Doyle turned up later. They said things about Angela . . . said she'd been going to night clubs. . . . Oh, I couldn't make them say straight out what they meant, but I could see they suspected her in

some way. Then there was a row, and I told them to go to hell, and cleared out."

Sir Peter's face was grim as he rang his bell.

"Find out whether Mr. Furlong has arrived," he said to the girl who appeared. "If so, say I'd be glad to see him."

No more was said until the door opened and Richard entered.

Theale greeted him briefly, and came to the point at once.

"Vance has been telling me a strange story," he said.

"He appears to think you suspect Angela Farren."

"Of what?" Richard asked quietly.

"He isn't quite sure."

"Then does it matter?"

"It matters a lot——" Vance broke in, but Sir Peter cut him short.

"Leave this to me," he ordered. "Furlong, I don't want to dictate to you, but I must insist on being told whether there is any truth in Vance's suggestion."

"I admit that some of Miss Farren's proceedings have seemed to call for investigation."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want to worry you."

"Worry me? Don't be ridiculous! Surely I've a right to know anything that concerns my own staff? I insist——"

"Very well, then. I am inclined to think that Miss Farren knows more than she has admitted, and it is my business, as your agent, to find out what she knows and why she is hiding it."

Sir Peter stared at him for a moment, and then positively guffawed.

"Really, Furlong," he said, "this is too much! Even the police were not fools enough to suspect Angela!"

"The police have had her under observation ever since

the night of Pettigrew's murder," Richard responded coldly.

Sir Peter grew red.

"Indeed?" he said sarcastically. "I suppose they'll be following *me* about, next?"

"No doubt they will, if they see any need for it."

Sir Peter hurled a perfectly good cigar into a wastepaper basket. Richard picked it out and placed it in an ashtray.

"You'll set the place on fire if you're not careful," he remarked.

"Will you tell me what you have against Angela Farren, or won't you?" Sir Peter demanded, with the calmness of desperation.

"Very well, I'll tell you—though you'll only work yourself into a fresh fury if I do. Angela Farren has been leading two lives, to put it melodramatically. She was your secretary here; she has also been taking part in the cabaret entertainment at a night club of very dubious reputation. She is personally acquainted with men of whom I have the gravest suspicion."

"It's a lie!" Vance shouted.

"Wait a moment, Vance," said Sir Peter, with ominous quiet. "Furlong, we have been friends for some time. Your father is a friend of mine, too. I should be sorry to end our friendship, but I must warn you to be careful. You are speaking of a lady for whom I have a very deep regard. Damn it, man, if I were twenty years younger I'd ask her to marry me! As it is, I'm—well, I'm going to take good care she isn't made unhappy. When I asked you to take up this case——"

"When you asked me to take up this case you gave me a free hand. If you want me to drop it, say so," Richard interrupted. "You insisted on knowing about Miss Farren. I didn't want to tell you. But as long as I'm running the show I must do it in my own way."

Can't you see that I'm only trying to get at the truth?"

"But Angela's in the country. She rang me up this morning at my house."

"I daresay she did ring you up, but that doesn't prove she's in the country."

"Do you suggest she was lying?"

"Certainly. Why, I had lunch with her at Victoria station, when you thought she was miles away from London. Now perhaps you'll tell me *I'm* lying?"

Theale hesitated, in dire perplexity. He could not believe that Angela would deceive him, yet he could imagine no reason why Richard should make such amazing suggestions if they had no foundation in fact.

Richard seized his opportunity.

"I'm sorry I have had to be so frank," he said, "but let me assure you that I believe Miss Farren has her own reasons for what she is doing. What those reasons are I hope to find out, if you wish me to go on with the case. It is unfortunate, I think, that she would not confide in me. She even made me promise not to tell you about her, she was so anxious you should not be upset."

"Where is she now?" Vance demanded.

"At the moment, I honestly don't know. Perhaps Reed does, but he hasn't told me. I believe she is still in London, but I cannot be sure."

Sir Peter reflected.

"Let me ask you a plain question," he said. "Do you think that she—she——?"

"Had anything to do with Pettigrew's murder? No, I don't."

Sir Peter's hand shook a little as he lit a fresh cigar.

"Then let's leave it at that," he said. "I'm quite sure that Angela will explain all this presently."

"You wish me to go ahead?"

"Please do."

Richard hesitated.

"I don't like making predictions," he said slowly. "They have a nasty habit of not coming true. But I know how keenly you felt Pettigrew's death, and I will go so far as to say this: if you will be patient a little longer, and let me go my own way, I hope to prove beyond doubt that neither Angela Farren nor Vance had anything to do with it."

"I hope to God you will," rejoined Sir Peter soberly; "but how?"

"By catching the murderer," said Richard.

CHAPTER XX

RICHARD was more troubled about Angela than he had cared to admit to Sir Peter.

It had given him a nasty jar to see her face at the window of Dr. Wang's house.

Why had not Wang told him she was there? He had believed that the ex-mandarin was dealing straightly with him, but he knew that Oriental methods were tortuous and that morality was interpreted very differently by East and West.

Yet to a Chinese gentleman a debt of honour was an obligation that must be met, even if it meant the ruin of himself, his family and half his relations as well.

Richard resolved to take the bull by the horns.

Leaving the *Courier* office, he drove to Abbey road and asked to see Dr. Wang.

The impassive Chinese butler showed him into the room in which he and the ex-mandarin had met on his previous visit, and there Dr. Wang came to him presently.

The old man welcomed him with an obvious pleasure

that made it doubly difficult for him to voice his suspicions. Dr. Wang was not slow to observe his diffidence.

"You are concerned, my friend," he said. "Will you not tell me what has happened?"

"I'm afraid you won't like what I'm going to say, but I must know where I stand with you," Richard answered, and Wang's eyes peered at him keenly.

"I beg that you will explain," he replied.

"I will. When I was leaving your house after our talk, I looked up at the windows and saw——"

Dr. Wang stopped him with a gesture.

"So that is it?" he interrupted, smiling. "You saw the girl Angela Farren? And you have, I fear, allowed yourself to imagine all sorts of cunning plots and intrigues in consequence, with myself as their author? Come, Mr. Furlong, I had rated your intelligence more highly. But at least I thank you for telling me your suspicions so frankly."

Richard was annoyed to find himself colouring like a school-boy rebuked by his master. Whatever he was, Dr. Wang had been a great man, and there was a grave dignity in his manner as he went on:

"It appears to be necessary to remind you that I have pledged myself to help you."

Richard bowed.

"This person," Wang went on, dropping into his quaint phraseology, "has done many things which have been accounted good or evil according to their effect on the persons concerned; but even his enemies have never accused him of dishonouring his sacred promise."

"Let me assure you——" Richard began, but again was stopped by the other's uplifted hand.

"It is true that the girl was in this house while we talked," Wang went on, "but I did not know it. She

came soon after you had arrived, and said she must speak with me on a matter of great importance. My servant, knowing that I did not wish to be disturbed, begged her to wait in another room."

"May I ask what she wanted?"

"Certainly—and I think it will be best for her to tell you herself."

"Is she here now, then?"

"Yes. I persuaded her to accept the shelter of my poor house for the night."

He rang, and the servant appeared.

"Present my compliments to Miss Farren," he said, "and beg her to honour us with her presence."

The man hesitated, glancing at Richard, and spoke rapidly in Chinese.

Dr. Wang's face set in grim lines as he listened, and when the man had finished he dismissed him with a wave of his hand.

"I do not like this," he said, turning to Richard. "Miss Farren left the house just before you arrived."

"Without telling you?"

"She wished to do so, but I was at my devotions, and my servant would not interrupt me. He begged her to wait a little, but she refused."

"Didn't she leave any message?"

"Yes, she left a message. She had been called to the telephone, my man says, and seemed disturbed. She directed him to tell me that she had received a message from a certain person, urging her to meet him at once, on a matter of life and death."

"Did she say who it was?"

"Yes, she said it was Mr. Richard Furlong!"

Richard stared at him in amazement.

"But I never telephoned to her!" he protested.

"That is what disturbs me," Wang replied gravely.

"But she would have known it was not my voice," said Richard.

"I agree," Wang answered. "But would it not be a simple matter for the person who spoke to her to say that he was your servant, and that you had gone to some place at which you wished to meet her? He would certainly not suggest a meeting at your rooms."

"That's true; but there's another point. Unfortunately, Miss Farren was not inclined to trust me. At least, she had not much faith in what I was doing to clear young Vance. By the way, Vance has been released. I was going to tell you about that."

"I am glad. But do you think Miss Farren knew it?"

"I don't think she could have, if she was here yesterday evening and last night."

Dr. Wang took snuff.

"From what you have already told me," he went on thoughtfully, "the girl had not much faith in your methods, but she had no reason to doubt your good faith. If she believed that you had discovered some fact of great importance to her lover, there would be no reason for her to refuse to meet you."

"No, I suppose not."

"I think that is beyond doubt. When she came to me yesterday it was to tell me some of the things you and I had already discussed. It was the girl Mah Lee who persuaded her to come. I considered it advisable that she should remain here last night and leave London to-day for the country."

"Why?"

"I hope to tell my reasons very soon. Meanwhile, you will forgive me if I wait until I have something more than suspicions to lay before you."

"Very well," Richard agreed, having no choice in the matter. "Now there is another thing I want to

mention," and he related the attack made on him after his visit to the flat which Ledoux had occupied.

"You spoke of a Chinese knife," said Dr. Wang when he had finished. "Did you by chance bring it with you?"

"Here it is."

Wang took it and scrutinised it carefully.

"I am told it is a common type of weapon," Richard remarked.

"That is so," the other agreed; "and yet it is possible that we may learn something from it. May I keep it for a little while?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you. And now, as to Miss Farren. I will take such measures as are in my power to find her, but I think it would be well if you obtained the help of Scotland Yard without delay."

"You think she is in danger?"

Dr. Wang took snuff.

"I do not know," he answered slowly. "I do not think she is in danger of immediate death, but there are alternatives which it would be unpleasant to contemplate."

Richard rose hurriedly.

"I'll go and see Sergeant Reed at once," he said. "Do you know whether she left in her own car, or in a taxi-cab?"

"She used her car."

"A pity. A taxi would have been more easily traced. However, we must do our best."

Dr. Wang smiled.

"We must, as you say, do our best," he agreed.

While Richard and Dr. Wang were discussing her, Angela Farren was driving as fast as the traffic would permit towards Victoria Station.

Her first impulse had been to refuse to go; but, although she had sneered at Richard's abilities, she had been secretly impressed by the way in which he had deduced from the smear of paint on her dress the effort she had made to screen Vance. The telephone message she had received had been to the effect that Richard had made a discovery that might prove Vance's innocence, but that he needed her help to follow it up. If she preferred not to come, he must do the best he could alone, as Doyle had gone off to follow up another clue.

It was evident, she felt, that Richard's new discovery had something to do with newspaper work, of which she understood the technicalities, and she feared that without her aid or that of Doyle he might commit some blunder that might affect her own plans.

It did not occur to her to question the genuineness of the message, for her visit to Wang had been a secret; but she had seen Richard glance up at the window and she realised that he must have seen her there, when she incautiously parted the curtains.

If, however, she had had any suspicions, they would have been dispelled when she drove into the station yard.

A respectable-looking man in a blue suit approached and raised his bowler hat.

"Beg pardon, miss," he said; "are you Miss Farren?"

"Yes," she replied. "Who are you?"

"I'm Mr. Furlong's man, Miss; my name's Pratt. I 'phoned you for Mr. Furlong."

Angela was satisfied. It chanced that she had heard Pratt's name mentioned by Doyle as Richard's confidential servant.

"Where is Mr. Furlong?" she asked.

The man sank his voice to a whisper.

"He's gone on ahead, Miss," he explained. "He intended meeting you here, but something 'appened—I

don't rightly know what—so he left me to meet you and show you the way. He thought as you wouldn't mind driving me in your car, Miss."

"All right, jump in. Where are we to go?"

The man entered the car, sitting beside her.

"It's down Streatham way," he explained. "There's a man there in a private nursing home that Mr. Furlong wants you to see. I think he's pretty bad, and Mr. Furlong wanted to get you there as quick as he could. He told me to ask you to hurry, Miss, and to apologise for him for not waiting for you."

Angela had started her engine while he was talking.

"All right," she said, and swung the car out of the road and away south by Vauxhall Bridge.

The man maintained a respectful silence until they approached Streatham, when he indicated from time to time the route she should follow.

At last they reached a large house on the edge of the common, standing some distance from its neighbours and surrounded by extensive grounds circled by a high wall.

They were expected, for a pair of heavy iron gates were flung open as the car approached, and Angela drove up a gravelled drive and stopped outside the house.

Her companion sprang out and rang the bell, and the door was opened by a hard-featured woman in nurse's uniform.

"Miss Farren?" the woman asked. "Mr. Furlong is expecting you. Will you come this way, please?"

She led Angela to a room on the first floor.

"The patient is very ill," she said, her hand on the door-knob. "It has been necessary to darken the room. Will you go in?"

She opened the door and Angela entered a room in which a shaded light burned dimly.

As she peered about, the door closed sharply behind her, and immediately the room was flooded with a blaze of light.

She looked about her, bewildered. It was a spacious room, comfortably furnished, with a half-drawn curtain at one end revealing a bed and a dressing-table in a sort of alcove. The windows were partly open, but were guarded outside with heavy wooden shutters, pierced with a few holes apparently for ventilation.

Save for herself, there was not a soul in the room.

"Mr. Furlong!" she cried.

Then she ran to the door and tried desperately to open it, but it was locked.

A thin snicker of laughter made her start.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Farren," said a voice that she could not recognise, although it was oddly familiar.

"We are not going to hurt you—at least, I hope that won't be necessary. Just be a sensible girl and don't give trouble, and it will be all the better for you."

"How dare you?" Angela cried. "Who are you?"

The laughter interrupted her again.

"You'll find out in good time," the voice assured her. "You're wondering where my voice is coming from, aren't you? There's no mystery about it, my dear; just a sort of loud speaker arrangement fitted in the wall."

Angela summoned up her courage.

"What have you brought me here for?" she demanded.

"Just to keep you out of harm's way," was the reply.

"You've been a bit too inquisitive lately, and it isn't good for little girls to poke their pretty noses into affairs that don't concern them."

Angela sat down, facing the wall from which the voice appeared to come.

"I suppose you think you're very clever," she re-

torted, "but you've made a mistake this time. I think you'd better let me go. Before I left Dr. Wang's house I told him where I was going, and if I don't get back soon he will go to the police."

Again came that snicker of laughter that made her blood boil.

"Do try and be more original," begged the voice. "Why, you yourself didn't know where you were going until you met our man at Victoria."

Angela bit her lip at the failure of her attempted bluff, in which she had forgotten the obviously weak link.

"Why not be a sensible girl and tell us what you and Wang and that fool Furlong are after?" the voice went on, with a persuasive note.

"I'll tell you nothing!" Angela answered definitely, cheered by the suggestion that she was a hostage of potential value.

"Not even to save your friend Mr. Vance?" sneered the voice.

Angela refused the bait.

"Tell that to Scotland Yard," she suggested, and was glad to detect a note of asperity in the reply:

"I suppose you think that's very funny! Well, we'll see how you feel about it when you've had time to think things over."

Angela waited, but the voice remained silent, and she proceeded to examine her prison. She shook the door, but it was evidently secured by bolts at top and bottom as well as the lock. The windows were hopeless; closer inspection showed that there were stout iron bars fixed between the shutters and the window panes. There was no fire in the grate—an electric heater was plugged into the wall—and iron bars had been fixed across the chimney.

Apparently the imprisonment was not to be made too irksome, however, for there were books and magazines

on a table, and near them a box of cigarettes and a petrol lighter.

She lit a cigarette and sat down to think things over.

She was furious at having fallen so readily into the trap set by her kidnappers, but there was nothing to be gained by raging about it, she decided. The question was: who had kidnapped her?

Her thoughts turned to Dr. Wang.

She had been dubious of the wisdom of confiding in him, but Mah Lee had persuaded her, and his ready sympathy and promises of aid had delighted her. He had hinted that in his opinion she might stand in some danger, and she had agreed eventually to his suggestion that she should stay the night in his house, and then go into the country to some place from which she could keep in touch with him.

Now she began to ask herself whether his plan had not been merely a device to detain her until he could get her safely out of the way.

It would be useless for him to pretend that she had not visited him, for Mah Lee knew she was going and Furlong had seen her at the window; but he could assert that she had left for an unknown destination, and it would be impossible to disprove her assertion.

She saw now how foolish she had been to accept the story of Richard Furlong's telephone message, without taking precautions to verify its truth. She knew only too well in what a path of intrigue she had been walking, and she wished, too late, that she had not so contemptuously refused the aid of Furlong and Sergeant Reed.

Her reflections were interrupted by a sharp tap on the door.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"I've brought you some lunch," a woman's voice

replied. "If you'll stand over by the fireplace, and promise not to move, I'll bring it in."

"All right," Angela agreed.

The door opened and the woman who had received her entered and placed on a table a tray bearing a quite appetising cold luncheon.

Angela calculated the chances of a dash for freedom. The pseudo-nurse was a tall, powerful woman, but Angela was well-knit and had plenty of spirit. Could she get away? As if in answer to her thoughts the man who had met her at Victoria lounged in the doorway, toying carelessly with a heavy life-preserver.

"Don't try it on, Missie," he advised, not unkindly. "Eat your lunch and take things easy a bit."

Angela smiled.

"Perhaps you're right," she answered. "I'm really quite hungry," and she approached the table.

"You're a plucky girl," said the man, grinning, as he and the woman withdrew.

Angela heard the lock turn and the heavy bolts shoot home.

"Well, I may as well eat," she said philosophically, and proceeded to make a hearty meal.

CHAPTER XXI

FURLONG hurried off to Scotland Yard, a good deal disturbed in mind.

He felt, not for the first time, that he was dealing with opponents as resourceful as they were daring.

The cool way in which they had used his own name to decoy Angela Farren away particularly enraged him, and he resolved to urge Sergeant Reed to use all the Yard's resources to find her.

Reed needed no urging.

He heard Richard's story with a growing impatience, and hardly was it finished when his hand was on his desk telephone.

"We're held up for the moment," he said to Richard, after a brief colloquy with one of his assistants. "I've got a man watching Miss Farren, as I told you—in fact, two of them at the moment. One was watching Wang's house, but I had another near in a car, as I thought she might dash off somewhere. The man at the house saw them getting out her car, and signalled to the other fellow, who followed her. He'll report to me as soon as he knows where she's gone, but of course he'll have to find a telephone, so it may take some time. If he doesn't come through soon, I'll send a call to all stations to keep a look-out——"

"There's nothing else we can do meantime, I suppose?" Richard broke in.

"Well, can you suggest anything?"

Richard had to admit that he could not.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"I don't like it," the detective admitted frankly.

"Think she's in danger?"

"Impossible to say. It's quite clear that somebody thinks she knows too much, and wants her out of the way—but whether permanently or only temporarily remains to be seen."

"Unless, of course, it's just a yarn she's made up to get out of Wang's house," Richard suggested.

"It's possible—everything is possible—but it doesn't seem very probable. She could have made up fifty stories that would have been quite plausible, without dragging your name into it. Why should she?"

"I don't know."

"But you don't trust her."

"Why should I?"

Reed laughed.

"You're still sore at the way she scored off you," he retorted, "but that doesn't prove she's a wrong 'un. No, I think she's been kidnapped, all right. The question is: who did it?"

"And why?" Richard added.

Sergeant Reed shot a glance at him.

"You're quite satisfied that Dr. Wang is on the square?" he hinted.

"I've no reason to believe he isn't," Richard answered uneasily. "He seems quite open with me. Of course, these Oriental devils are so——"

"I know," interrupted Reed, who had been over that ground before. "This tangle has got so many ends to it that one has to be careful . . ."

He broke off and sat staring into vacancy, and Richard forebore to interrupt his thoughts.

"I'd like to have a talk with Dr. Wang," he said presently.

"Why not?" asked Richard.

"Oh, I could go there in my official capacity, of course," Reed admitted, "but I want to avoid that if I can. If I could meet him casually——"

Richard took the hint.

"Suppose I ask him to come and see me, in return for my visit?" he suggested. "You could drop in while he was there."

"Thanks. I hardly like to ask you," the detective replied. "But you must tell him who I am."

"You think he might know you by sight?" asked Richard, laughing.

"Well, I wouldn't put it past him, to tell you the truth. But there's more in it than that. You are on good terms with him, and I don't want to do anything that would spoil your relations with him. Wang may be very useful to us, and you're the best card we have in the pack, so far as he is concerned."

"You won't find it easy to pump him."

"I don't expect to. I've met Chinese people before. But I think it might be a good idea, all the same."

"I'll fix it up, then."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Furlong. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll just run my eye over these reports . . ."

There ensued a period of waiting that wore Richard's nerves to a fine edge, and he positively jumped when the telephone rang.

"Yes?" said Reed. "Oh, put him through to me . . . That you, Matthews? What's the news?"

He listened for a space.

"All right," he said. "No—don't do that—it would only delay things. You be at the corner of the road—yes, I know it—to meet us. We'll come down at once. But don't lose sight of the house, whatever you do."

He put down the receiver.

"We've found out where she is," he said to Richard. "Just a minute," and he took up the telephone again. "I want a fast car and two men besides the driver, all armed. Sharp, now!"

He put down the telephone, took an automatic pistol

from a drawer and slipped it into his pocket. Then he left the room for a few moments.

"Come on, Mr. Furlong," he said on his return. "I'll tell you about it as we go along."

They ran downstairs, and a few minutes later were threading their way through the traffic in a powerful tourer.

"She went to Victoria Station," Reed explained, "and met a man there. After a short talk she drove him to a big house in Streatham, where they went in. I've got a search warrant and I'm going to raid that place, and chance the consequences. The whole thing may be perfectly innocent, but I must risk that. Matthews—that's our man down there—wanted to get help from the nearest station and surround the place, but I was afraid she might come out and slip off while he was away."

It was a quick run. They got jammed in a traffic block at Vauxhall Bridge, but one of the detectives nipped out and spoke to the policeman on point duty, and a way was cleared for them as though by magic.

At last they reached their destination, and found a two-seater car by the roadside, the driver apparently engaged in tinkering with his engine.

He ran up to them as they slowed, and jumped on to the running-board.

"Straight on, sir," he said. "That house standing back from the road."

A moment later they pulled up at the big iron gates, and a man emerged from the tiny lodge at Reed's call.

"Open the gates, will you?" said the Sergeant pleasantly. "We're going up to the house."

The man eyed them furtively.

"Have you an appointment, sir?" he asked. "You see, we've got some queer cases in there"—he tapped

his forehead significantly—"and the doctor doesn't like them disturbed."

"That's all right," Reed answered sharply. "Open the gates——"

He broke off and leaped out of the car as the man made a bolt for the lodge.

"Damn it! He's going to telephone!" cried Reed, who had noted the wire leading from the lodge. He shook the gates, but could not move them.

"Nip over, two of you," he ordered. "Quick, before he gets away."

Two athletic fellows scaled the gates in a few seconds, but not before the custodian had dashed out of the lodge and made a dash across the grounds.

The detectives gave chase, and presently pounced on him and brought him back, handcuffed.

In the lodge they found the keys, and the gates were flung open.

Reed left a man to guard the prisoner, and the car dashed up the drive to the house.

The door was closed, and there was no answer to their ring, but Reed was prepared for that.

One of the men produced a jemmy, and the door flew open with a groan of rending wood and iron.

Hastily they searched the ground floor, but found no one, although they found the remains of a meal in one room. Reed hurried through to the back premises, where the doors of a garage stood wide open. It was empty, but there were tyre-marks that led them to a door in the wall at the back of the garden.

"Blast them!" cried Reed. "They've got clear. I ought to have taken your advice, Matthews, and waited until the place was surrounded. It was that damned watchman that gave them the tip."

"I wonder if they've taken Angela Farren with them," Richard remarked. "Oughtn't we to look?"

"Of course! There's just a chance that they hadn't time. She'd have struggled, of course, and delayed them, unless they've murdered her or drugged her."

They hurried back to the house and began their search.

On the first floor they found the locked and bolted door of Angela's prison.

"Hullo!" said Reed, "look at those bolts!"

He kicked at the door and shouted:

"Miss Farren! Are you in there?"

"Yes," came a faint voice through the thick wood.

The bolt was shot back, and the useful jemmy came into play again, and the next moment Angela was confusedly trying to explain her blunder and express her gratitude at the same time.

Reed cut her short.

"That's all right," he said cheerfully. "Now, if you please, we must hurry you away. We must get back to town."

"Where had Miss Farren better stay?" Richard asked.

Reed hesitated, and the girl smiled demurely.

"I'm sure Mr. Reed thinks a nice, clean prison cell would be the best place for me," she said.

"I'm not sure that it wouldn't be the safest," the detective retorted. "However, I think your own flat will do, with one of our men within hail. But I would like you to promise me, Miss Farren, that you won't set out on any more adventures without letting me know."

This time it was the girl's turn to hesitate.

"I suppose you are right," she admitted, "but——"

"But you want to get Mr. Vance out of prison?" Reed put in. "Well, he's out already."

"And rather annoyed because you are . . . staying in the country," said Richard.

Angela's face flamed.

"You've released him?" she cried, and Reed nodded.

"I'll do anything you think best, Mr. Reed," said the Angel meekly.

"May I make a suggestion?" asked Richard.

"Of course."

"Go back to your job at the *Courier* office to-morrow, but come and have dinner with me this evening."

Before the girl could answer, Reed nodded emphatically.

"I think," he said gravely, "that would be a very good idea."

"Very well," Angela agreed, hopelessly bewildered.

CHAPTER XXII

RICHARD took the Angel to dine in a quiet restaurant where the food was excellent and the service discreet.

The girl was in high spirits, and had not failed to mark Richard's quick glance of admiration at the picture she made in a frock of old gold that was just the right setting for her lithe young body, and the wonderful hair that crowned a head set proudly on a slim neck.

"Feeling better?" Richard asked, as they reached the coffee stage and he handed her a cigarette.

"Better than I've felt for ages," she confessed.

"If it's any comfort to you, you're looking simply marvellous—though I suppose I ought not to say so."

"Why not? Everybody likes to be told that—and I think it's very nice of you."

"I'm forgiven, then?"

"Quite."

"Thanks. But I mustn't sail under false colours. I had nothing to do with getting Terry Vance out of gaol, you know."

"You had nothing to do with putting him there,

either. I had a talk with Mr. Reed on the way back to town, and I see how silly I've been."

"We all do silly things sometimes," said Richard hastily.

"Even you?" she asked innocently.

"Even I—and if you're going to pull my leg, I'll ask Reed to get you sent to Dartmoor for the rest of your natural life!"

"I apologise! But seriously, I have made a mess of things, haven't I?"

"That's rather a difficult question. Now, look here, An—I beg your pardon, I mean, Miss Farren——"

"That's all right," she interrupted, laughing. "All my friends call me 'Angel,' and you can, if you like."

"I see what you mean, and I think it's jolly good of you. We're friends, then?"

"Of course."

"Splendid! Now, Angel, I'm going to be brutally, horribly frank with you. You've been rather a naughty girl, and you've caused no end of trouble——"

"I'm sorry!"

"Wait a minute. I say you've caused no end of bother—but if you hadn't, I might have missed a clue that may put a rope round the neck of Pettigrew's murderer."

The girl leaned forward.

"Who do *you* think killed him?" she breathed.

Richard shook his head.

"I think *I* know, and you think *you* know," he answered. "I'm not going to ask you who you suspect, and I don't want you to ask me just yet who I suspect. Perhaps I'm right; perhaps you're right; it is even possible that we may both be right. But there are certain reasons why I don't want to discuss it just now. Please trust me, and remember that it is terribly important that you should not even hint at your suspicion to anybody—to *anybody*! Do you understand?"

"I think I do," she murmured.

"All right. Now, you were surprised, I could see, when I asked you to have dinner with me, and surprised again when Reed urged you to accept. The reason is that we've several things to arrange with you before you go back to the office."

"I don't quite understand."

"I know, and you won't be very pleased when you do. The fact is, Sir Peter has some idea of your goings-on at the Mandarin."

"Sir Peter?" she cried. "But who could have told him?"

"This is where we test our pact of friendship, Angel. I'm afraid I'm partly responsible."

"You? But you promised me——"

"I did promise you, and I didn't break my promise. This is how it happened. Reed and Doyle and I were in my rooms, discussing the case. Then Vance came in. An unfortunate word dropped by one of us put Vance on the scent. Then he and Doyle—well, they had a scrap before we could stop them, and Vance cleared out. The unfortunate part of it is that Vance went to Sir Peter the next morning and gave the show away—purely with the idea of defending you, believe me. Then Sir Peter went for me, and I had to admit that your proceedings had caused us a good deal of anxiety. There; I've tried to put it all in a few words, but you can see what a fix we're in."

The Angel nodded.

"I see," she answered slowly. "Of course it was natural enough that you should suspect me . . . but I did hope Sir Peter wouldn't be worried. He's been so good to me. What are we to do?"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. It's quite terribly important that neither Sir Peter nor Vance should do anything rash at this stage of the affair. On

the other hand, to tell them nothing at all would make things worse than ever. Will you let me call for you in the morning, take you to the office, and tell them just as much as I think is good for them?"

"Is that quite fair?"

"I think it is. If your father were seriously ill, you wouldn't rush in and tell him that the bank he had put all his money in had just gone smash, would you?"

"I suppose not."

"Of course you wouldn't. You'd tell him that everything was all right. I promise you that what I may fairly call this harmless deception is only for a few days. After that you can tell them everything, when I have no doubt they will express their contempt and loathing, and cast you off for ever."

The Angel could not help laughing.

"You are too absurd!" she declared. "But I suppose you're right. You'd better do the talking, and I'll try not to let you down."

"Now indeed I feel justified in calling you 'Angel,'" said Richard, laughing. "Seriously, I'm very glad you see my point. It's a rotten business altogether, but we must just make the best of it. Now, I don't see any reason why you should go back to your flat and sit until bedtime worrying over things, so I ventured to book a couple of seats for a certain revue."

The girl's eyes filled with tears.

"You are being very sweet to me," she murmured.

"We shall have to rush," said Richard hastily. "Waiter, my bill."

The next morning Richard called for Angela at her flat—where a plain-clothes man was discussing jockeys and starters with the inn porter—and they walked together to the *Courier* office and ensconced themselves in the privacy of Handley's room.

Richard gave directions that he was to be informed as soon as Sir Peter arrived, and presently that choleric gentleman rang him up.

"Oh, Sir Peter," said Richard, "I've got Miss Farren here with me. She's much better, and she proposes to start work again."

"Does she?" Theale interrupted grimly. "Bring her here, please."

Richard turned to the girl.

"Cling to the rigging, my child," he said. "Barometer falling rapidly; storm cone hoisted. Deep depression over the proprietor's room. In other words, Sir Peter is about to raise Cain!"

Angela threw back her head proudly.

"Come on," she answered curtly, and together they went to Sir Peter's room.

The Angel started and coloured as she saw that Doyle and Terry Vance were already there, but she did not wait to be questioned. She opened the attack with an audacity that made Richard chuckle inwardly.

"Good-morning, Sir Peter," she said calmly. "I'm feeling all right again, after the holiday you so kindly made me take. Shall I see Miss Young and take things over from her?"

Theale coughed.

"One moment," he said. "I am glad you are better, but I . . . in point of fact, there are one or two things I have to ask you to explain."

"May I butt in?" Richard interrupted. "The fact is, Miss Farren, I'm afraid I'm partly to blame. As I have already explained to you, I was rather puzzled by some of your doings, and perhaps I gave Sir Peter a wrong impression."

"Impression!" said Theale. "You said things that——"

"That I am very glad to be able to correct," Richard cut in.

"Then why the devil did you say them?" Sir Peter exploded.

"We all make mistakes," Richard answered coolly. "Miss Farren has done a very brave thing. You know already how she tried to save Vance from the consequences of what was a stupid blunder on his part. What you don't know is that while he was under arrest she determined to try and get him out again. She had not much faith in my efforts——"

Here Sir Peter raised his eyebrows in an affected surprise that made Vance chuckle audibly.

"I'm quite aware that you haven't, either," Richard went on equably, "but that's beside the point. What I want to explain is that Miss Farren, believing that Pettigrew used to go to the Mandarin club, had the courage to go there herself to try and find out anything that might help Vance. It is not every girl that would do as much, and I take my hat off to her. She has explained everything to me quite openly, and now that Vance has been released, of course, she feels that she can resume her work here with an easy mind. I can only add that I offer my apologies to her and to you for having——"

"Please don't say any more," Angela interrupted. "It was quite natural that you should wonder what I was doing, and I'm afraid I was rather rude to you. May we forget all about it, please, Sir Peter?"

Theale beamed.

"Of course," he replied heartily. "Furlong, I was hasty, too. Now, look here, all of you: let's celebrate Vance's release and the Angel's return—oh, I know they call you that! I keep my ears open, you know!—let's celebrate by having lunch together. Fix it up, Doyle, will you? Telephone to the Everyland Hotel and tell

them to have a table for us at one o'clock. Now clear out, will you, and let me get on with my work; it's nearly conference time.'

In Angela's room there was a general burying of the hatchet.

Vance, impulsive as ever, seized Doyle's hand and shook it, and there was a good deal of confused talk, in which Richard contented himself with vaguely genial generalities.

Then he took Doyle off to his own room, where the crime reporter regarded him with a quizzical smile.

"What's the joke?" Richard asked.

"Only that you have a talent amounting to genius for artistic falsehood!" Doyle replied. "But all's well that ends well. The Old Man is delighted, of course. His two ewe lambs are cleared and he will presently wash their fleeces in a magnum or two of champagne. He's like that, bless him!"

Richard laughed.

"Well, what more do you want?" he asked.

"O.K. with me. But I'd like to know just what you are really up to?"

"You shall. Events have moved swiftly, my lad. Don't tell Sir Peter this: the Angel was kidnapped yesterday. If Reed hadn't been on her track and had her watched, she wouldn't be here now."

Doyle turned white.

"Kidnapped?" he cried. "What the hell do you mean? Who kidnapped her?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Richard replied, and he described the girl's adventure.

"This is getting a bit too thick!" Doyle muttered, his hands clenched. "Haven't you or Reed any clue?"

"Reed's doing all he can. The watchman fellow at the Streatham house is in custody, of course, but he's turned

sullen and won't speak. If you ask me, he is afraid to say a word. He struck me as being scared stiff."

"I wonder if he's one of Wang's people?"

"So do I. That dear old gentleman has his own way of doing things, I fancy. But why should he kidnap the Angel like that? She was actually in his house at the time."

"By the way, what was she doing there?"

"Oh, she explained that. She went and sort of threw herself on his mercy. Mad thing to do, of course, but you know what girls are. She thought he might know something that would help her to clear Vance."

Doyle's face darkened, and Richard nodded understandingly.

"You bit my head off when I hinted at things before," he said, "but do let me just say that I understand how you feel."

At that Doyle lost his self-control.

"That young Vance is a fool!" he cried, "and Angela's a million times too good for him. If he hadn't been such an idiot she wouldn't have got into this mess. I don't mind telling you, Furlong, that now that he's out of gaol I'm going to try my luck with Angela again——"

He stopped abruptly, and Richard busied himself with his pipe.

"That's your affair," he said quietly. "You must do as you think best. Meanwhile, what about fixing up that luncheon party?"

"Damn the luncheon party," Doyle muttered. "However, Sir Peter means well. I'll see about it. What are you going to do?"

"I'm keeping in touch with Reed. Until he gets some line on the kidnapping party, I don't quite know what to do."

"Any job for me?"

"Same as before. Scout round on the off-chance of something turning up. Sorry I can't suggest anything more definite."

"All right. I'll let you know at once if anything occurs to me. See you at the Everyland, then?"

"Right."

When the reporter had gone, Richard sat down and read the *Courier* with an air of contentment that Angela would no doubt have attributed to his success in dealing with Sir Peter had she been there. As it was, she was listening with even greater contentment to certain things which Terry Vance had to say to her.

CHAPTER XXIII

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT REED was annoyed; and when Reed was annoyed it generally meant trouble for someone else sooner or later.

In this case the object of his annoyance was the mysterious person responsible for the abduction of Angela Farren.

What particularly incensed the detective was the fact that he had so airily hinted to Furlong that he need not concern himself with that young lady's movements, as they were already the subject of Scotland Yard's august consideration.

Reed had at once taken the routine steps to find the owner of the Streatham house, but without success. The tenancy had been arranged in the name of a Dr. George Morris. The process was simple, and one with which Reed was familiar. A perfectly reputable firm of house agents had been approached by a man whose description was in no way remarkable. He represented himself as secretary to Dr. Morris, a mental specialist

who wished to find a large, quiet house in which he could accommodate a few patients who required special care, although not sufficiently ill to be certifiable for an asylum. As that most satisfactory of all credentials, a banker's reference, was forthcoming, and as "Dr. Morris" was quite willing to pay a stiffish rent in advance, the agents had congratulated themselves on a good stroke of business, and thought no more about the matter.

Reed had questioned the man they had arrested, but had encountered a sullen refusal to give any information. As the Third Degree method of examination, beloved of the sensational novelist, is not employed at the Yard, Reed had wasted little time on the man, leaving him to chew the cud of reflection until he was in a more amenable frame of mind.

He resolved to go down to Streatham and have a more leisurely look round.

What puzzled him was the fact that the house existed at all—or rather, existed as the quasi nursing home of the mysterious Dr. Morris.

The tenancy transaction had been completed nearly a year previously, so that the house could not have been acquired merely as a temporary prison for Angela Farren.

Reed ordered a police car and set out for Streatham, taking Detective Hill with him.

Their first visit was to the divisional police station. The divisional detective-inspector, however, could tell them very little. So far it had proved impossible to trace the fugitives' motor-car. Inquiries had been made among the local tradesmen, most of whom had tried to secure the custom of the house, only to be told by the gatekeeper that all supplies were obtained by contract with one of the big London stores.

Reed had rather expected that.

"They haven't left much to chance, whoever they are—or whoever this Dr. Morris is," he commented.

"No," the detective agreed. "What are you going to do now?"

"I want to have a good look round the house," Reed replied. "Dr. Morris is a fake, of course. At least, the house is not owned or used by any Dr. Morris in the Medical Directory. He might be an American, it's true, but he's probably just a crook."

"Very little doubt of that, I should say," the inspector agreed. "I wonder what his game is. He evidently wanted a quiet place to play it in, whatever it may be. I should try the house; you may get a clue there. I'd come with you, but I'm very busy. Let me know if you want any help."

Reed and Hill drove to the house. Just as they reached the entrance gates the detective noticed a postman on a bicycle and stopped him.

"Just a minute," he said. "Are you on this beat, or round, or whatever you call it?"

The man stared at him with some suspicion, and Reed produced his warrant-card.

"It's all right," he explained. "I am Detective-Sergeant Reed, of Scotland Yard, and I'm making inquiries about the people of this house."

The postman smiled.

"Oh, that's all right, then," he answered. "You see, we have to be careful. People often try to get information out of us——"

"I know," Reed interrupted. "Tell me, have you ever seen the owner of the house?"

"Dr. Morris? I'm not rightly sure, but I think I have. We didn't have many letters for this place, and what we did have we delivered to the porter at the gate. But one morning I saw a man talking to the porter just inside the gate. He looked as though he might be Dr. Morris,

by the respectful sort of way the porter listened to him, if you know what I mean. But of course that's only my guess."

"Quite. What was the man like?"

"Big man, he was; over six feet, I should say. I don't know that I should have noticed him only for his face."

"What was wrong with his face?"

"He'd a big scar across one side of it."

"Had he, indeed. On the right side, running down from the ear?"

"That's the bloke! D'you know him, Mr. Reed?"

"Not sure. Anyhow, it's a useful hint and I'm much obliged to you. By the way, there's no need to talk about it. Get me?"

"I get you," replied the postman with a grin.

"Thanks."

"Well, I'll be getting on, then, if there's nothing else you want. 'Morning, sir."

He rode off, and Reed turned to Hill with a chuckle.

"Hear that?" he asked. "*A man with a scar on his face!* That sounds uncommonly like Mr. Jeff Carson. I thought all along he was a pretty bad case. Of course, he's not the only man in the world with a scarred face, but I really think we're on the right track this time. Come on; we'll try the house."

A plain clothes constable who had been put in charge of the place admitted them, and Reed lit a cigarette and arranged his plan of campaign.

"You go upstairs, start at the top of the house, and work down," he directed Hill. "I'll go down to the basement and work up. Call me if you find anything important."

The house was rather old-fashioned, with large cellars reached by stone stairs. In the cellars were a quantity of coal, some miscellaneous litter such as old packing cases and straw, and one newer-looking and unopened pack-

ing case. Reed prised open the lid of this case with an old poker he found in a corner. It was filled with green cardboard boxes, each about six inches square by about three inches deep. Each box was stamped in gold lettering with the words, "Mandarin Club," and the sign of the Dragon.

Reed was highly pleased. Although the boxes were empty, they formed another link in the chain that linked the house in Streatham with the night club owned by Dr. Wang and managed by Mr. Jeff Carson. He slipped one of the boxes into his pocket and continued his search.

The lower rooms, however, yielded little of interest, except by inference. From the appearance of the kitchen Reed deduced that only sketchy meals were prepared there. One of the ground floor rooms was plainly furnished as a sitting-room; the others were devoid of furniture.

The next two floors, save for the room in which Angela had been imprisoned, and for another sparsely furnished as a bedroom, were unused.

On the third floor Reed found Hill in a room which contained more interesting objects. Hill was examining with considerable curiosity a row of shelves on which were neatly arranged a number of small china figures.

Reed smiled as he saw them.

"Another link," he said. "I've seen these things at Wang's club. They are little figures of mandarins, some intended for use as paper-weights, others as ash-trays, pin-trays, and so on. They give them away to the guests on special nights at the club. Look at this box; I found a case full of them in the cellar. Half a minute——"

He took up several of the little figures one by one and arranged them in the box.

"You see," he remarked, "the box is made to hold four of the figures—a normal tableful of guests."

Hill nodded, still staring at the shelves, and Reed followed his gaze.

"What are you so interested in?" he asked. He knew that Hill, though slow in speech and method, was a shrewd fellow whose dogged patience would not allow him to abandon any idea until he was quite satisfied that he had exhausted every possibility it might offer.

"You'll notice how those mandarins are arranged, Sergeant," Hill answered reflectively.

"In fours? Well? Obviously ready for packing," Reed replied with a hint of impatience.

Hill shook his head.

"Mind if I break one or two or them?" he asked.

"Break them? No—but what on earth for?" Reed demanded in astonishment.

Hill did not answer in words. With a half apologetic grin he produced a heavy clasp-knife, selected one of the little figures, and carefully tapped it until the head fell off. Placing the pieces on a table, he selected another figure and tapped it still more cautiously. When the head came off in his hand, he carried the other portion to the window, peered at it, and then handed it to Reed.

"Look what's inside it, Sergeant," he said quietly.

Reed looked, gave a sharp exclamation, and then turned the broken image upside down on his hand.

A tiny paper package fell out. Reed unrolled it and stared at the white powder it contained.

"Cocaine, by all that's wonderful!" he cried. "Splendid work, Hill! What a fool I was not to think of it. I'll see you get a jolly good pat on the back for this, my lad!"

Hill grinned delightedly, for the Yard is not lavish of its praise.

"But what made you think of it?" Reed went on.

"It was like this," the detective explained. "The first thing I noticed was that all the little figures were

arranged in groups of four. As you said, that was no doubt to save trouble in packing. But look, Sergeant; see these four here. Notice anything different about any of them?"

Reed scrutinised them. "One of them has got what's intended for a sapphire button in its hat. That's the mark of a mandarin of a special grade."

"Well," Hill went on, "I wondered why one in every four had that special mark, instead of them being all mixed up anyhow. Then I remembered one or two things you'd told me before about Wang and Carson and that club. It seemed to me that——"

"That's enough, my lad," Reed cut in. "I'm kicking myself hard enough as it is! You've hit it all right! The figures with the sapphire button were the ones with the drug, and whoever served them out could not make a mistake. If there were four people at a table, it would be easy to give the marked figure to the person it was intended for. Probably plenty of other boxes were made up with just ordinary figures, without any of the drug. But, my hat, they must have been doing a huge trade! Let's see, there must be at least a hundred figures on that shelf alone. Well, thanks to you, I think we've got enough evidence to show what the real business of the Mandarin club is. Why, the gambling business is only a sideline compared with this! Now, we'll leave this for the moment. I'd like to finish the search, but there are other things to be done first."

"You'll arrest Carson at once?"

"Not on your life!" was the surprising reply.

"But——"

"My lad," Reed interrupted impressively, "there's penal servitude in what you've discovered here. That's O.K.—but don't forget that there's a gallows waiting for the man who murdered Pettigrew, and that's the man I'm out to get!"

CHAPTER XXIV

MISS LUCILE VERNON, known to a large circle of admirers as Mah Lee, frowned at her reflection in the mirror on the dressing-table in her little flat in Maida Vale.

She had slept late, risen in a thoroughly bad temper, and trifled with a luncheon for which she had no appetite.

She tried to read, but could not fix her thoughts on her novel, and threw it down in despair.

At last she rang for her maid.

"What time is it?" she asked. "Nearly four? All right. You can give me a cup of tea, and then you can have the rest of the afternoon and evening off if you like. I shan't want you."

The tea refreshed her, and presently she sat down to make a rather late toilette.

A ring at the bell disturbed her. She was about to tell the maid that she did not want to see anyone when she remembered that the girl had gone out.

Impatiently she threw a brocaded dressing-gown about her, went to the hall door and opened it.

There stood Jeff Carson.

He was the last person she wished to see, and her manner showed it.

"Hullo, Lucile," he said. "Thought I'd come round and beg some tea."

"Sorry," she answered. "I'm dressing. I was late this morning . . . and my maid's out . . ."

"Oh, that's all right," he answered cheerfully. "I can forage for myself, if you'll let me."

He shouldered his way in breezily, shut the door, and playfully pushed the girl into the sitting-room.

"I must say you don't seem awfully glad to see me," he remarked, putting his hat and gloves on a table and throwing himself on a couch.

At that her patience gave out.

"I'm not!" she retorted bluntly.

Carson only laughed, and lit a cigarette.

"Why are you so unkind to me?" he asked. "You know I'm madly in love with you——"

"Oh, don't start that all over again," she interrupted. "I've told you it's no good."

Carson still smiled, but the scar on his face stood out with an odd lividness.

"Perhaps you would rather be the Honourable Mrs. Richard Furlong," he suggested, with a sneer. "Girls are always attracted by a title, even if it's only a courtesy one."

"At least he's a gentleman," she answered acidly, and he flushed.

"My family is as good as Furlong's," he retorted, "and as for money——"

"Your family may be highly respectable," she broke in, "but I don't think you're on sufficiently good terms with them to introduce me! When a man has been chucked out of the Army, his people are usually a little cool to him and his friends."

"Look here, cut that out!" said the man, angrily. "That Army business was all a mistake, and it's all over now, anyhow."

"If it's any satisfaction to you," the girl went on coldly, "I have as much intention of marrying Mr. Furlong as he has of marrying me—and that's none at all."

"Quite. Gilded youths don't *marry* girls of your class," Carson sneered. "You see how generous I am in offering to make an honest woman of you."

Lucile, white with anger, bent to where he lounged on the couch, and struck him on the lips.

He sprang up, a wicked glint in his eyes; then forced a laugh.

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean that. But you drive me crazy. You know I'm mad about you. Look here, why must we quarrel? You might as well marry me now as later, for I'll take damn good care no one else gets you."

Lucile took a cigarette.

"Must you really be going?" she asked coolly.

Carson snatched the cigarette from her and threw it into the fireplace, following it with his own.

"Listen to me," he said quietly. "I'm going to marry you, whether you like it or not. It's time you forgot that fellow Pettigrew——"

"Leave him out of it!" she cried sharply.

"Oh, so you *were* in love with him, then? I always suspected as much. Well, he's dead now——"

"Yes, he's dead, and perhaps you know why!" she broke in.

The next moment she regretted her words.

Carson stepped back, breathing heavily, as though he had received a heavy blow.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked thickly.

"I only mean . . . I knew you were jealous . . . I thought . . ." she stammered, terrified by the look in his eyes.

Carson seized her wrist in a vice-like grip and stared into her eyes. Dragging her close to him, he kissed her savagely on lips and neck, and on the white shoulder from which he tore her robe. Then he threw her on the couch and stood looking down at her with a sardonic smile.

"You little devil!" he muttered. "So you thought

you'd frighten me, did you? What do *you* know about Pettigrew's death?"

"More than you think!" she cried, in desperation. His lips twitched.

"So?" he answered. "And you believe that I . . . know something . . . ?"

"I'm sure you do——"

She stopped abruptly.

Carson bent over her, his eyes blazing.

"You fool!" he snarled. "Do you realise that I could choke the life out of you as you lie there, and I've a damn good mind to do it, too! But I won't. No, no, you're much too pretty to be killed. But keep that tongue of yours quiet, will you, or I'll——"

He broke off and stood rigid, listening intently.

"What was that?" he cried. "I thought you said there was no one here? If you're double-crossing me——"

He sprang back as the door opened and Sergeant Reed appeared, followed by Hill.

"She's not double-crossing you," Reed said pleasantly. "In fact, Miss Vernon had no idea we were here."

"How did you get in?" the girl demanded. "The door was locked."

"It's quite a simple lock," he assured her.

Carson pulled himself together.

"Well, suppose you clear out again, as nobody asked you to come in," he suggested. "I didn't know it was part of your job to pick locks like a burglar."

"There are quite a lot of things you don't know about my job," Reed replied calmly, "but we haven't time to discuss them now. I must ask you to come with me. I arrest you on a charge——"

A warning cry from Hill interrupted him.

Carson's hand had gone to his hip-pocket. Reed

sprang forward, there was a sharp report, then the three men became locked in a struggling mass.

The police officers were powerful, but Carson fought desperately, and presently they fell in a heap, Carson's head striking the edge of the fender.

"Well," Reed remarked, "it's no good my cautioning him in that condition. Better put the handcuffs on him before he comes to, Hill, or he'll give us more trouble. Sorry to have upset you like this, Miss Vernon, but I couldn't afford to risk his making a bolt for it. I've a closed car outside, and we'll get him away without making a scene. I only hope nobody in the building noticed the pistol shot."

"But what has he done?" the girl breathed, as Carson opened his eyes, groaned and stirred.

Reed looked at her thoughtfully.

"I think we'll talk about that later on," he answered. "Get him on his feet, Hill. That's right. Good-after-noon, Miss Vernon."

Left alone, Lucile sat for a moment in dumb amazement. Then, hurrying to the telephone, she demanded a number in eager haste.

CHAPTER XXV

HALF an hour after Reed had bestowed his prisoner in safety at Scotland Yard, Richard Furlong arrived there metaphorically at full gallop—in other words, as fast as a heavily bribed taximan dared to drive him.

"Glad you got my message," Reed greeted him. "I wasn't sure where I'd find you, so I told them to telephone to your rooms."

"Pratt knew where I was," Richard explained. "He 'phoned the message on, and I came at once. What's doing?"

"I've got Carson. Arrested him half an hour ago at that girl Vernon's flat—Mah Lee, you know."

Richard whistled.

"Good hunting!" he said. "But had you enough to go on?"

"Plenty."

As briefly as possible the sergeant recounted his visit to Streatham, and Hill's discovery of the cocaine in the Chinese figures.

"Very clever," Richard commented. "What did he say when you arrested him?"

"He didn't say much," Reed answered dryly. "You see, there was a bit of a rough and tumble, and he got knocked out. He pulled a gun and tried to shoot me, and when we got him down he hit his head on the fender and was all out for a bit. When he came to he shut up and refused to say anything, except that he'd see a lawyer and make us sit up, and that sort of thing, you know."

"Quite."

"After we'd gone, Mah Lee telephoned to Dr. Wang."

"How do you know?"

"I thought she might, and I had her telephone line tapped."

"What did she say?"

"Only that she wanted to see him at once. He told her to go to the Mandarin club, and he'd meet her there. I've got a search warrant, and I'm going there now."

"May I come?"

"Of course. That's why I 'phoned you."

"Thanks. Taking Hill with you?"

Reed laughed at the thrust.

"I certainly am," he replied. "Come on; I want to hurry."

Richard accompanied him to the courtyard, where Hill was waiting in a police car.

"Hullo, Hill," said Richard. "I hear you've been distinguishing yourself! Good work!"

The detective grinned.

"Nothing much, sir," he answered. "Just a bit of luck, you know."

"The Silent Service!" laughed Richard. "You fellows are pinching the Navy's copyright."

Despite his cheery words, he was rather silent as they drove to Bloomsbury.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Reed, who had glanced at him once or twice.

"I wonder if they're worth it," Richard rejoined.

"I'll risk it."

"Keep your penny for the moment. Perhaps I'll ask you for it presently."

Reed took the hint, and they finished the journey in silence.

At the Mandarin club they alighted and Reed led the way in.

"I want to see Dr. Wang," he said to an attendant, and a moment later they stood in the manager's office,

where Dr. Wang received them with impassive courtesy.

"This is my very good friend Sergeant Reed, of the Criminal Investigation Department," Richard explained. "I have spoken of him to you before."

"Indeed yes," Wang replied. "I am happy to meet one of whom I have heard so much. I beg that you will be seated."

"I will come to the point at once, Dr. Wang," said Reed, acknowledging the compliment with a slight bow. "I have just arrested your manager, Carson. He will be charged, among other things, with illicit traffic in drugs. I wish to search his quarters here, and I may add that I hold a search-warrant for that purpose. If you would like to see it——"

Dr. Wang waved his hand.

"It is unnecessary," he answered. "The place is at your disposal, as I am myself."

"Thank you. It is only right, however, to warn you——"

"That my own share in the matter may be open to question? My dear sir, that goes without saying. In fact, I anticipated your visit, and came here to receive you. I was already aware that you had arrested Carson."

"Mah Lee told you, of course."

"It was her duty to do so," Wang replied simply, "but I do not rely on her alone. I have other sources of information. For example, I was as interested as you were in the ingenious device of the little Chinese figures in which Carson concealed his cocaine."

"Indeed? May I remark that you did not consider it worth while to mention your discovery to the police?"

"Why tell you what you knew already? Believe me, I hope presently to be of even greater assistance than that."

Reed's face gave no hint either of belief or of disbelief.

"I shall be glad of any help you or anyone else can

give me," he answered formally. "Now, will you show me Carson's rooms?"

"Certainly. This was his offices; you may care to look round here first. He lived in a small bachelor flat at the top of the house."

The office revealed nothing of interest, and they ascended to the top floor, where a couple of rooms had been made into a sitting-room and a bedroom respectively, with a tiny bathroom adjoining.

Here Reed set himself to make a meticulous search, while Dr. Wang sat patiently by and took snuff at intervals.

For a considerable time Reed drew blank. Then he gave an exclamation of satisfaction. There was a writing-desk under the window of the sitting-room, and this he measured with great care; inside and out. Hill's jack-knife was once more requisitioned, and presently a small panel in the back of the desk was prised out, revealing a secret cavity from which Reed extracted some papers and a small black notebook.

These he pored over for some time.

"They are in cypher," he explained, "but our people at the Yard are used to cyphers, and I don't think they'll find this one very difficult. The book is a sort of ledger, and I think we'll be able to bring Mr. Carson's drug transactions to light pretty easily."

Richard, who had been poking about the room, nodded thoughtfully.

"That's excellent," he said, "but you've found nothing else of special interest, I suppose?"

Reed's eyes narrowed.

"No," he answered. "Have *you* found anything?"

Richard unwrapped a handkerchief and exhibited a small key of the Yale type.

"Where did you find this?" asked the sergeant.

"In the top right-hand drawer of the dressing-table in the next room, in a stud-box."

"That's funny," Hill muttered. "I could take my oath I went through that drawer a few minutes ago, Mr. Furlong."

"It wasn't there then."

"What are you getting at?" Reed demanded. "What is this key?"

"It's the key of the flat in which Victor Ledoux was murdered. Don't touch it. I think you'll find a perfectly good finger-print or two on it."

Reed stared at the key and then at Furlong.

"How did you come by it?" he demanded.

"I lay myself open to a criminal charge if I answer that," Richard explained, smiling. "The fact is, with Mah Lee's assistance I burgled Mr. Carson's rooms last night while he was out, and found the key. You remember that when Ledoux was found dead, it was his landlady who found him and gave the alarm?"

"Yes."

"Well, I took those rooms afterwards for reasons which we needn't bother with at the moment. It was then I found out that Mrs. Evans, the landlady, had a key of her own to Ledoux's door, so that she could go in and tidy the place when he was not there. I don't know what you did with Ledoux's property——"

"It's still at the Yard. No one has turned up to claim his things."

"Well, I think you'll find that the key of his flat is not amongst them."

"What made you think Carson had it?"

"I'll tell you that later on, if I may. Look here——" He took another key from his pocket. "This is another key of Ledoux's flat. Mrs. Evans had it made for me. You'll see that it is exactly the same pattern as this one in the handkerchief. I fancy we'll find that Mr. Jeff

Carson was the 'friend' who walked home with Ledoux, stabbed him in the back, and got away without being seen."

"Well, I'm damned!" Reed exclaimed. "But why didn't he leave the key there, or throw it away?"

"I can't say for certain. Either it was one of those mistakes that—as you know even better than I do—even the cleverest crook will make; or else he thought he might want to go there again for some reason we don't yet know. Anyhow, take the key and get the fingerprints photographed, and see whether Carson's prints correspond."

Reed took the handkerchief, wrapped it carefully round the key, and put it into his pocket.

"That looks like putting a rope round Mr. Carson's neck," he said grimly. He turned to the Chinese, who had listened to all this with an inscrutable face. "Now, Dr. Wang," he went on, "I have to point out to you that there can be no doubt that Carson was carrying on his drug trade in premises belonging to you. You will see that the possible inference is a serious one. Do you care to make any statement or suggestion?"

"Certainly," Wang replied calmly. "I suggest that you and Mr. Furlong—and Mr. Hill (that is the name, I think?) honour me by accepting an invitation to a little party I propose to give here to-morrow night."

Reed frowned.

"I am not joking," he said stiffly.

"Nor I, my friend," the Chinese assured him. "May I beg you all to be seated and listen to me for a little while? Then you can decide whether or not you will accept my suggestion."

Reed hesitated. Then he sat down, and at a glance from him Furlong and Hill did the same.

"Now, Dr. Wang," he said, "I am prepared to hear what you have to say."

The ex-Mandarin tapped his snuff-box and took a pinch. Then he leaned forward and spoke in his quaint, precise phrases for nearly ten minutes.

When he had finished, Reed rose.

"Dr. Wang," he said gravely, "what you have told us is so serious that I must consult my chief before I give you an answer. I think, however, that Mr. Dale, the Assistant Commissioner, will agree to your proposals. So much for my official reply. Unofficially, let me say that if this is how you administered justice when you were in China, I do not wonder that the criminals were afraid of you!"

Dr. Wang bowed.

"Thank you," he answered with a faint smile. "We have our own way of doing things in my country. It may not be your way, but it is not altogether without its advantages."

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN Richard went to the *Courier* office the next morning he found Sir Peter Theale walking up and down his room with a puzzled frown on his face.

"Morning, Furlong," Theale greeted him. "Look here, what the devil does this mean?"

He held out a letter. Richard took it and read:

My dear Sir:

It is written: "To the stranger the gates of my house are not closed: the rice-jar is on the left, and the sweetmeats on the right, as you enter."

May I beg that you will honour me with your company at a little gathering at the Mandarin Club at the hour of half-past eleven in the evening of the day on which you receive this letter?

I have asked Mr. Richard Furlong, whom I have the honour to call my friend, to add his entreaties to mine, and I hope that the poor entertainment I have to offer may not be wholly unacceptable to such a profound student of human nature as yourself.

Permit me to adopt the Western manner of subscribing myself,

Faithfully yours,

WANG.

Richard laid down the letter and smiled.

"Quaint fellow, Wang," he remarked.

"But what does he mean? Damned impudence, I call it! I don't go to third-rate night-clubs——"

"Just a moment, please. In the first place, there's nothing third-rate about the Mandarin. In the second place, Dr. Wang is a gentleman, and a very interesting man into the bargain. You'll like him when you meet him."

"But I don't want to meet him."

"Well, you're going to—to oblige me."

"What for? Isn't that the place where—where Angela——?"

"Yes, that's the place where Angela tried to find out about Pettigrew. She's been asked to Wang's party, too, by the way."

"Has she? Then I'll take good care she doesn't go."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. You'll be a good fellow and have dinner with me at the club, and then we'll go all gay and dash round to the Mandarin." He dropped his bantering tone and laid his hand on the other man's arm. "Seriously," he went on, "this is a big thing. It was I who asked Wang to invite you to the show."

"But what's going to happen there?"

"What's going to happen! Only this—you are going to be told who killed Pettigrew!"

Sir Peter started.

"What?" he cried. "You've found out?"

"Let's say that a joint committee of us have found out. But for heaven's sake keep it to yourself. Even now one false move would spoil everything. I shouldn't have said as much as I have if I didn't know you wouldn't give me away. I don't want you to tell anybody—not even Miss Farren—that you're going to the party. Will you promise me that?"

"I suppose I must, if you insist. But can't you give me a hint——?"

"Not even the shadow of one! Sorry, Theale, but it's not my secret only. Now I must clear out. See you at dinner at eight?"

"Oh, all right!" Sir Peter grumbled, and Richard escaped and made his way to Angela Farren's room.

"Morning, Angel," he said cheerily. "Got your best bib and tucker ready for the party?"

The Angel's face was troubled.

"Do you think I ought to go?" she asked.

"Go? Of course! Your beauty and charm will shed a radiance on the whole show!"

"Do be sensible!"

"All right; I will. You go to the party, my child, and don't be afraid. I'll look after you. Has Vance told you that he's been invited? He has? All right. Be there about quarter to eleven, and come to my table. I'm taking Sir Peter——"

"Is *he* going?"

"Yes—but I told him not to tell you, so don't pretend to know it. And don't tell anybody that you're going, either. Shall you be seeing Vance again this morning?"

"I might," the girl admitted, colouring.

"Strange how things happen! Well, *if* you do, please tell him from me to keep his head shut about it, will you? I mean it!"

"All right; I'll tell him. But I *would* like to know——"

"Of course you would! And you shall—about eleven o'clock to-night! Cheer-ho!" And he shot off to his own room, where he found Doyle waiting.

"The very man!" he cried. "Have you heard that Reed has got Carson?"

"Got Carson? What do you mean?"

"He arrested him yesterday afternoon on a charge of drug traffic. Carson kept mum—reserved his defence and all that—but Reed says he's got all the evidence he wants. So gambling wasn't the only thing that happened at the Mandarin! But I can't stop to tell you all about it now—I'm in an awful hurry. See you at the Mandarin to-night. Wang's got a party on and he told me he was sending you an invitation."

"Yes, he did. But won't he be involved in the drug charge?"

"Reed didn't say. Anyhow, he's not arrested yet." He took his hat. "Excuse me now, will you? See you to-night about eleven? Right!"

He tore out of the room, and Doyle scratched his head in bewilderment and lit a cigarette.

Richard dashed about, as he would have put it, a good deal during the day, and had just time to change and get to the Greville club by eight o'clock that evening.

Sir Peter was waiting for him.

"Oh, so you've come then," Theale greeted him. "Began to think you'd forgotten."

"Punctuality is the politeness of princes," Richard replied. "You will perceive that it is exactly eight o'clock. Have a cocktail?"

"No. I've had two already."

"Wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging," Richard reproved him, as he ordered a cocktail for himself.

Sir Peter thawed under the influence of a good meal, and Richard cunningly lured him into a bridge game after dinner, thus avoiding questions which he did not wish to answer.

At half-past ten he caught Theale's eye and they made their apologies to the other two men of the four.

Theale's car was waiting, and they drove to the Mandarin.

"I wanted you to come early to see the place," Richard explained. "I don't know myself what Dr. Wang's programme is, but I understand his party will be in a private room. Meanwhile, I booked a table and asked Angela Farren to join us. You don't mind?"

"I don't mind. But what shall we do while we're waiting?"

"Drink—and I hope Mah Lee will be giving her show."

"Who's she?"

"Marvellous person. You wait till you see her."

They were evidently expected at the Mandarin, for a Chinese boy sprang forward to receive them and piloted them to a table reserved for them in the big room, where a good many people were dancing.

"What do you think of the place?" asked Richard.

"Not bad," Theale admitted, "and the people seem fairly decent. Hullo, who's this?"

Dr. Wang, clad in his mandarin's robes, had entered the room as the music stopped. Instead of making his usual leisurely round, he came straight to Richard's table, and bowed as he and Theale rose.

"I have the honour to present Sir Peter Theale to your Excellency," Richard said formally, and Theale bowed.

Dr. Wang waved his hand with a dignity which Theale was too shrewd a judge not to appreciate.

"It was very kind of you to invite me," the newspaper owner said.

"It is you who honour me," Wang returned. "I hope that at another time we may meet in other circumstances. For the moment, I came only to say that a servant will presently beg you to follow him to another room, where certain things will be made known to you. Until then——" he bowed and left them.

"Well?" asked Richard.

"He's certainly a striking figure," Theale admitted. "I don't mean his clothes, of course; there's something *about* the man——"

"Exactly. Hullo, here's the Angel!"

The girl had arrived, convoyed by Vance, and Richard signalled to them.

"They make a decent pair for double-harness," Richard remarked. Sir Peter sighed.

Richard took the girl to dance, leaving Theale and Vance to comfort themselves with champagne.

"Nervous?" Richard asked.

The girl looked up at him trustfully.

"No, not with you," she answered.

"A very charming compliment!" he assured her. "If I were not a perfect little gentleman, I should kiss you for that! Also, Vance would knock my head off!"

She laughed and blushed.

The dance was a short one, and hardly had they taken their seats than the usual wild chord heralded the appearance of Mah Lee.

If she was nervous, she gave no sign of it. Indeed, there was a certain suppressed exaltation about her that unconsciously communicated itself to her audience. But Richard, knowing what he did, shook his head, fearing a breakdown.

Mah Lee, however, was sure of herself.

Her first turn was a butterfly dance, in which the

grace of her movements made Sir Peter grunt approval.

Then she vanished, to reappear in the garb of a Chinese girl of poor station. She moved slowly with downcast eyes, to the middle of the floor.

Into the silence crept a soft wailing note from the orchestra, and Mah Lee started half to sing, half to recite, an old Chinese romance.

It was the story of a village girl who was loved by the son of a mandarin. Angela's hand sought that of Terry Vance as the picturesque phrases told of the lovers' meetings on the moonlit river bank, while the songs of the boatmen crooned greetings as their *sampans* floated by on the quiet stream.

The music deepened to a harsher note as Mah Lee, her voice quivering through the silent room, told of the crafty assassin lurking in the shadows, to spring forth even as the lovers' lips met, and bury his dagger in the young man's side. A scream; pad-pad of slippered feet in flight; the girl's cry of anguish—then Mah Lee, snatching a keen knife from her bosom, thrust at her heart and fell gasping to the floor.

Richard caught his breath. For a moment he thought that Mah Lee, weary of life, had indeed thus dramatically ended it.

The next moment she had sprung to her feet, a hand at her heaving breast, to bow her acknowledgments of the storm of applause.

The next moment she had vanished, and Richard turned to the others.

"Well?" he asked, like a showman awaiting his just reward.

"Gad, she's marvellous!" Sir Peter said frankly. "We must write her up in the *Courier*. She must be made, and we'll make her. Arrange to see her and get her story, Vance, and fix up about photographs. And

don't fall in love with her, or you'll make Angela jealous."

"Right, sir," replied Vance, and the Angel smiled as though she were not greatly alarmed by the suggestion.

"Lucile's a dear," she said. "I'm so glad you like her show, Sir Peter."

"You know her, then?"

"Oh, yes," she answered. "I appeared with her in a turn here one night."

"The devil you did!" he retorted. "Vance, you'd better hurry up and marry this young woman, and stop her gallivantings, or I'll have to do it myself."

"Marry her, or stop her gallivantings?" asked Richard.

"Both—and you mind your own business and try not to be jealous!"

"Here's Mr. Doyle," Angela put in, and the crime reporter made his way to their table.

"Come on and have a drink," Theale invited him, in the hearty way that made his staff worship him when they were not cursing him.

But Richard rose as a Chinese boy appeared at his elbow and whispered.

"I'm afraid there isn't time," he said. "The party is about to begin. Dr. Wang is waiting for us."

A sudden silence fell upon them. Then, at a gesture from Sir Peter, the attendant led the way out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

To Richard's surprise, their guide led them downstairs to where Jimmy, the barman, presided over the cocktails.

There was no secrecy this time, however. An attendant marshalled them into the telephone box lift, Vance and the Angel being the first to descend.

"I hardly expected this," Richard whispered to Doyle.

The crime reporter hesitated.

"What's Wang's game, do you think?" he asked.

Richard shrugged his shoulders.

Doyle went over to the bar and demanded a cocktail, which he drained at a gulp.

"Give me another," he ordered.

"Steady on, Doyle," said Sir Peter.

"It's all right, sir. I've . . . I've been feeling a bit run down. . . . These cocktails of Jimmy's are wonderful for pulling you round."

He drank the second one, and Richard pushed him to the lift.

"Take Sir Peter down," he suggested; "you know the way."

They vanished, and Richard turned to Jimmy while he waited.

"No gambling to night, eh?" he hinted.

The barman laughed and leaned forward confidentially.

"That's all been stopped, sir," he whispered.

"There's been queer goings on here, and I don't know what'll be the end of it. There's two plain-clothes coppers out in the hall, and police in 'arf the rooms of the place. I seen Mr. Reed, of Scotland Yard, going down with Dr. Wang just now."

"Well, well," said Richard. "And what about you? You seem to be taking it pretty coolly."

"What's the good of taking it any other way, sir? It ain't no good worrying. If they're going to pinch me, I can't 'elp it. It ain't no good trying to do a bunk with the 'ouse surrounded."

"You're a philosopher," Richard remarked.

"There's worse things to be than that, sir," Jimmy answered, grinning. "But I'm hoping for the best. It ain't the first police raid I've seen, and there's something funny about this one—Mr. Carson disappearing like that, and Dr. Wang being so friendly like with the police. Anyhow, I just keeps my mouth shut and waits."

"Very sound," Richard approved, as he got into the lift and descended to the basement.

The room in which gamblers had watched so eagerly the turn of a card had been rearranged.

At one end a carved chair had been placed, with a smaller chair on each side and a semi-circle of divans in front of it.

On the carved chair Dr. Wang had taken his seat. On his right sat Sergeant Reed, debonair in a well-cut dinner jacket.

On the divans Richard saw Sir Peter Theale, Mah Lee, Angela, Terry Vance and Doyle.

A powerful electric lamp threw a strong light on the group. The rest of the room was dimly lit, but in the shadows near the door by which he entered Richard perceived Detective Hill and a couple of other men in plain clothes.

Dr. Wang pointed to the chair at his left.

"Will you please come and sit beside me, Mr. Furlong?" he requested, and Richard complied, his heart thumping with excitement despite his efforts to keep calm.

Dr. Wang tapped his snuffbox and took a deliberate pinch.

"Sir Peter Theale, ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I beg that you will forgive this somewhat theatrical setting for the last scene of a drama in which we are all interested.

"It has seemed convenient that I should begin the necessary explanation, because I have been to some extent unwittingly responsible for what has happened.

"It is right, also, that I should tell you that I have placed myself unreservedly in the hands of my good friends Mr. Furlong and Mr. Reed. I have broken the law of your country. I have allowed in this place forms of gaming which are forbidden. I admit it, and I fear that my head is still unbowed with shame.

"But that for which I hold myself culpable is that my trust in my servants has permitted them to do things for which stern punishment is demanded

"A life has been taken. A life must be given in payment.

"It has been said: 'The honest man acknowledges his fault and makes reparation. The evil man hides his sin, but the eye of the law discerns him and he is delivered to the tormentors.'

"I have said what is appointed for me to say. Let others now speak."

He signed to Reed, and the Sergeant took up the story, his easy, conversational tone contrasting oddly with the older man's stilted phrases.

"Dr. Wang," he said, "has asked me to tell you something of this affair. I need hardly say that it is in confidence. The whole proceeding is irregular, but my chief has been kind enough to give me a free hand, at the special request of Dr. Wang.

"You all know about the murder of Mr. Pettigrew in the *Courier* office. It was that crime that started the

inquiries that led to the discovery of what was going on here.

"Let me say at once that without the co-operation of Dr. Wang it would have been much more difficult for me to get to the bottom of things. But the real credit belongs to Mr. Furlong."

Here Richard began to protest, but the detective silenced him.

"Wait a minute," he said. "You've got to tell them all about it presently, but it's my turn first. We'll go back for a moment, if you please, to Mr. Pettigrew's murder. You will remember that I arrested Mr. Vance on suspicion, and very angry you all were with me for doing it. Just how far I really suspected Mr. Vance is a matter we need not go into now. My instructions were definite. It was proved that he had seen Pettigrew's body and had concealed the fact; it was known that he and Pettigrew were not on friendly terms; so he was arrested and detained as a matter of precaution. Subsequently he was released, and I hope that he has realised by now that I was only doing my duty."

"That's all right," Vance assured him handsomely.

"Thank you. Now we come to Miss Farren. The first thing that attracted attention to her was the very clever way in which she removed the evidence of Mr. Vance's visit to the room in which the dead body was found. From an official point of view, of course, it was a most improper thing to do, and there is no excuse for her. But as we are being altogether unofficial and irregular, I don't mind saying that I only wish I knew a young lady who'd do as much for me!"

Sir Peter guffawed, and Angela blushed as they all looked at her.

"The next thing Miss Farren did," Reed went on, "was to decide that she could handle this case much better than either the Yard or Mr. Furlong could. She

was determined to clear Mr. Vance, and she preferred not to take us into her confidence. In consequence, I found it necessary to keep rather a sharp eye on her. She had picked up a hint that Pettigrew frequented this place. As it happened, she knew Miss Vernon, who appears here as Mah Lee, and she went to her for help.

"You will excuse me," he interrupted himself to say gravely, "if I have to be a little personal, but I cannot help it if I am to make things clear. Miss Vernon, I believe, was attached to Mr. Pettigrew."

At this Mah Lee hid her face in her hands, and Reed hurried on:

"I need only say that Miss Vernon had reason to know that Carson, the manager here, was in love with her, and that he was jealous of Pettigrew. In fact, from what I heard Carson say to Miss Vernon, I know that that is true.

"Miss Vernon knew, of course, about the gambling that went on here, but I am satisfied that she knew nothing more. She did not know that Carson was conducting one of the biggest illegal drug businesses I have ever yet come across."

Doyle gave a sharp exclamation, and Reed held up his hand.

"Please don't interrupt," he begged. "Look at this——" and he held up one of the little Chinese figures in which the cocaine had been concealed, and explained its use.

"I found this," he went on, "or rather, Detective Hill found it, in a house at Streatham which Carson had leased in the name of Dr. Morris. It was to that house that Miss Farren was taken when Carson kidnapped her——"

He was interrupted by an explosion from Sir Peter.

"Kidnapped?" Theale cried. "What do you mean? Why wasn't I told about it? What on earth——?"

"Please, Sir Peter," Angela murmured, and he subsided unwillingly.

"Miss Farren had gone to Dr. Wang to ask him to help her," Reed explained. "Carson was suspicious, and he decided to get her into his power and find out what she knew."

"And Mr. Reed came and rescued me," Angela put in.

"That's what we policemen are here for," Reed retorted, smiling. "Now, I've talked enough. I've gone over the main points because——"

"But you haven't told us who killed Pettigrew," Sir Peter broke in.

"No. I will leave Mr. Furlong to do that," the detective responded gravely, "because it was he who spotted the man from the first, while I was still fumbling about on a side-line."

He left it at that, and there was a pause while Richard chose his words.

Dr. Wang, his thin fingers fondling the smooth ivory of his snuff-box, regarded the intent faces before him with the interest of a connoisseur of human passions.

Theale, his jaw grimly set, sat squarely in his seat. Angela and Vance were hand in hand. Mah Lee, her eyes glowing feverishly, tore a tiny lace handkerchief. Doyle, white and tense, tried vainly to still the working of his shaking fingers.

"When Sir Peter asked me to take up this case," Richard began, "I was struck at once by one cardinal fact. That was the letter that Sir Peter had received from an unknown person. It seemed to me that if one could only find out what was in that letter, it would go a long way towards clearing up Pettigrew's death."

"Doyle, who placed himself at my disposal, suggested that Pettigrew might have known what was in the letter, and the suggestion seemed to have something

in it, but the more I thought of it the less the theory seemed to hold water.

"It was, of course, quite evident that whoever killed Pettigrew must have been familiar with the *Courier* office. The whole thing was perfectly timed and arranged——"

He stopped as Doyle sprang up, livid.

"Stop this talk, damn you!" cried the crime reporter. "Speak out, if you know! Who killed Pettigrew?"

"*You know who killed him!*" Richard answered slowly.

Doyle swayed, his hands clenched and a fleck of foam on his lips.

Then he turned and sprang for the door.

"Hill!" shouted Reed, leaping from his seat, but already the waiting men had closed with the reporter.

Doyle fought savagely, but at last they mastered him, and carried him outside at a sign from the Sergeant.

"My God!" muttered Sir Peter heavily. "So it was Doyle! To think of it!"

"He fought like a madman," said Vance, shuddering.

"He *is* a madman," Richard responded. "Don't think too hardly of him."

"But he killed——" began Mah Lee.

"Yes, he killed Pettigrew," Richard interrupted gently. "But you don't know what drove him to it."

"Tell us," said Theale.

"I suspected him from the first," Richard explained, "but it was very difficult to prove it. Like all madmen, he was cunning. Mind you, he was not just an ordinary lunatic. I think he was always of a highly-strung temperament, and when I found that he was not only drinking hard, but taking drugs as well, I was more than ever sure that I was on the right track.

"Let me explain things as briefly as I can. It seemed

natural enough that Doyle, as chief crime reporter, should offer to help me. But I soon found that his help consisted in leading me just where he wanted. First of all he staged a row here, with Carson's help, in which I got a rough handling, and he pretended to be knocked out. I don't think they meant to murder me; only to frighten me off the case. Later on I arranged things so that he—and he only—knew that I was going to spend the evening in Ledoux's flat. That night I was attacked and stabbed. I couldn't be sure of the man, but I don't think there's much doubt it was Carson.

"My chief difficulty was to prevent Doyle from realising that I suspected him. I had to keep inventing things for him to do, and watch him at the same time.

"I was really sorry for him. He was not a bad fellow at heart, and he was madly in love with Miss Farren. He never imagined that Vance would have the bad luck to be arrested, and still less did he dream that Miss Farren would be mixed up in the business. So he had to try and keep clear of suspicion himself, and at the same time keep Reed and myself from suspecting them."

"I see that," Sir Peter broke in, "but what I can't understand is why he should have murdered Pettigrew at all."

"Ah, that's the point," Richard agreed. "I couldn't understand it either. It would take too long to tell all the work Reed and I put in—for of course I told him what I was after—before we got to the truth. Here is what happened! When Carson found that he had a pretty free hand here he got in touch with some of his previous associates and started selling drugs in a small way. But he was ambitious, and he saw there was a big fortune in it.

"He and Ledoux, his assistant, got hold of Doyle. Their first step was to induce him to take cocaine. Doyle found it bucked him up after a hard job of work, and

they soon made him a confirmed addict. Then, I have no doubt, they dazzled him with the prospect of a comfortable fortune if he came in with them.

"Where he was so useful to them was the fact that he has, so to speak, a foot in each camp with the police and the underworld. He knew a great deal about the Yard's methods and plans; he knew suitable men to aid in getting the stuff from abroad; and he was able to rope in quite a lot of victims as well through meeting so many people.

"From what we have found out, however, he got tired of the game. I think myself that it was because he had made a good deal of money, and he hoped to cut adrift from the gang, persuade Miss Farren to marry him, and settle down.

"But meanwhile another complication cropped up. Victor Ledoux, it seems, quarrelled with Carson over the booty. He did not consider he was getting a big enough share. He must have known a good deal about the *Courier* office from talking to Pettigrew and Doyle, and he conceived the idea of sending a sealed letter to Sir Peter, denouncing Carson—and probably Doyle as well.

"He reckoned that if that made Carson agree to his terms he could get the letter back unopened—relying on Sir Peter's promise—or if the worst came to the worst he could always turn King's evidence and get off.

"But Carson was a dangerous man to play that game with. Under the pretext of talking things over, he walked home with Ledoux, stabbed him and got away.

"Meanwhile Doyle, who had done a good deal of amateur acting, disguised himself as Sir Peter and went to the office. I don't think he intended for a moment to kill Pettigrew. He had every reason to believe that Pettigrew would take the letter out of the safe and give it to the messenger boy to take to Sir Peter's room.

"Unfortunately, Pettigrew took the letter himself. Then one imagines what happened: Pettigrew looks at the figure at the desk, hesitates, and says, 'You're not Sir Peter!' Doyle starts up, loses his head, and hits Pettigrew with the lamp with the idea of stunning him and escaping. Then he finds that he has struck too hard and killed him. He snatches the letter from the dead man's hand, leaves the office, changes his clothes and comes back in time to be present when the police arrive.

"Then he sees that the best thing he can do to avoid suspicion is to offer his services in finding the murderer.

"And that, I think," Richard concluded, "is all I have to tell you about it."

There was silence for a moment. Then Dr. Wang's grave voice broke the stillness.

"It has been written," he said: 'The superior man is light-hearted after the crop-gathering; he makes a festival.' Will you come with me to my poor house? There is food prepared——"

"And the sweetmeats are on the right, as you enter," muttered Sir Peter.

"Even so," replied Dr. Wang, permitting himself to smile.

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